

UN'S SPECIAL RAPPORTEURS

The UN's Special rapporteurs: who are they, what are they doing, what is their link to the right to health?

In this document, you will find all information about them!

INTRODUCTION

There are in the UN some mechanisms to take care either of a country's specific issue or of thematic issues in every part of the world. Among those mechanisms, called « special procedures », we find the Special rapporteurs.

Special rapporteurs are in charge of holding inquiries into violations and to intervene on specific issues or urgent situations. They therefore play an important role in the protection of human rights. They are independent, sit individually and cannot be appointed more than six years. Their mission is to study and draft a report on a country's situation about a human right issue.

For that purpose, special rapporteurs visit countries. They can decide to visit a State for themselves or further to specific allegations about human rights violations related to their mandates.

Special rapporteurs use a wide variety of information's sources. They conduct part of their research in concerned countries, discuss with authorities and victims and collect proofs on the ground. After their visit, the holder of special procedures' mandates presents a mission report with his/her conclusions and recommendations.

Some Special rapporteurs are in charge of receiving information from different sources: governments, intergovernmental organisations, non-governmental organisations, victims of human rights violations and witnesses.

When they receive reliable information on a human rights' violation related to their mandate, they can discuss directly with the governments concerned.

Don't hesitate to contact the concerned Special rapporteur if you consider that a human rights' violation took place, exists or might occur!

In appendix, you will find:

- The list of Special rapporteurs intervening directly with governments
- Your means of action to denunciate a fundamental rights' violation

For more information about special procedures, mandates, please visit on the website of the [High Commissioner for Human Rights](#)

The existence of those Special rapporteurs is a fundamental element for the defence of human rights. A lot of them are related, directly or indirectly, to the health.

THE RIGHT TO HEALTH, IN BRIEF

The right to health is actually «the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health».

This right was first articulated in the 1946 Constitution of the WHO.

But it is still difficult to know exactly what it covers.

A larger definition has been given by the UN Committee on economic, social and cultural rights, interpreting the right to health as ***“an inclusive right extending not only to timely and appropriate health care but also to the underlying determinants of health, such as access to safe and potable water and adequate sanitation, an adequate supply of safe food, nutrition and housing, healthy occupational and environmental conditions, and access to health-related education and information, including on sexual and reproductive health. A further important aspect is the participation of the population in all health-related decision-making at the community, national and international levels.”***

The right to health is composed of several rights which, when they are associated to the others, permit to attain the best possible health.

As an example, rights to food, to safe drinking water but also to education, which is a social determinant playing an important role for the health of people.

Example: how the right to education impacts the right to health?

The lack of education doesn't permit to every person to know the appropriate reactions to have in order to have appropriate health habits. With education, people will become aware of their means of action on their health.

More information about the right to health:

[The Right to Health, Factsheet n 31, WHO](#)

[Steps for Change, IFHHRO](#)

[General comments from the Committee on economic, social and cultural rights](#)

1 - SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON THE RIGHT OF EVERYONE TO THE ENJOYMENT OF THE HIGHEST ATTAINABLE STANDARD OF PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

Mr Anand Grove is the Special rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.

Prerogatives of the Special rapporteur:

- Control of the right to health's situation around the world;
- States' visits & report on national situation in terms of right to health;
- Communication with States and other concerned parties with regard to alleged cases of violations of the right to health;
- Promotion of the right to health;
- Annual reports.

More information on the Special rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health:
<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Health/Pages/SRRightHealthIndex.aspx>

2 - SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION

The UN Committee on economic, social and cultural rights, in the General comment No. 13, defines the education: « *education is both a human right in itself and an indispensable means of realizing other human rights.* »

It is important to understand that education permits to ensure all fundamental rights. Education is also essential to attain the best health possible. Mr Kishore SINGH is the Special rapporteur on the right to education since 2010.

More information on the Special Rapporteur on the right to education:
<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Education/SREducation/Pages/SREducationIndex.aspx>

3 - SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON THE RIGHT TO FOOD

Mr Olivier DE SCHUTTER is the Special rapporteur on the right to food since 2008.

For the Special rapporteur, the right to food is the right to have regular, permanent and unrestricted access, either directly or by means of financial purchases, to quantitatively and qualitatively adequate and sufficient food corresponding to the cultural traditions of the people to which the consumer belongs, and which ensure a physical and mental, individual and collective, fulfilling and dignified life free of fear.

With this definition, we understand that the right to food plays a fundamental role in the right to health; who could attain the best physical and mental health possible without food?

To ensure the right to health, the right to food has to be ensured.

More information on the Special Rapporteur on the right to food:
<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Food/Pages/FoodIndex.aspx>

4 - SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON EXTREME POVERTY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

People who are living in extreme poverty cannot enjoy their fundamental rights, as the right to food, the right to housing and the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.

People who are in this situation do not have means to see a doctor and cannot prevent diseases. Their right to health is not ensured.

Ms. Magdalena SEPULVEDA CARMONA is the Special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights since 2008. Her mission is to identify approaches for removing all obstacles to the full enjoyment of human rights for people living in extreme poverty. She makes recommendations on how persons living in extreme poverty can participate in the definition of measures affecting them.

The Special rapporteur studies the impact of discrimination on this situation and participates in the assessment of the implementation of [Millennium Development Goals](#).

More information on the Special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights:
<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Poverty/Pages/SRExtremePovertyIndex.aspx>

5 - SPECIAL RAPPOREUR ON THE HUMAN RIGHT TO SAFE DRINKING WATER AND SANITATION

The access to drinking water and sanitation is essential to live in dignity and ensure human rights. But there are still billions of people who cannot enjoy this right. Therefore those persons can't enjoy the best health possible.

That is why it is important to promote access to drinking water and sanitation all around the world.

Ms. Catarina DE ALBUQUERQUE is the Special rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation since 2008.

She has several missions:

- Establish a dialogue with all concerned parties in order to check out, promote and exchanges opinions on best practises related to the access to drinking water and sanitation then draft a compendium on best practises
- Draft a study in collaboration with concerned parties in order to define more precisely the obligations related to human right, including the non discrimination's obligation, which affect the access to drinking water and sanitation
- Make recommendations helping the assessment of the implementation of [Millennium Development Goals](#).

More information on the Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/WaterAndSanitation/SRWater/Pages/SRWaterIndex.aspx>

6 - SPECIAL RAPPOREUR ON TORTURE AND OTHER CRUEL, INHUMAN OR DEGRADING TREATMENT OR PUNISHMENT

The WMA is fully committed in the fight against torture and in its prevention. Torture is a grave violation of the human body and infringes the right to health.

The Special rapporteur, by visiting countries and publishing reports, give us some useful information. His mission concurs with the mission of [the Subcommittee on prevention of torture and national preventive mechanisms](#).

Mr Juan MENDEZ is the Special rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment since 2010.

His mandate comprises three main activities:

- Transmitting urgent appeals to States with regard to individuals reported to be at risk of torture, as well as communications on past-alleged cases of torture;
- Undertaking fact-finding country visits; and
- Submitting annual reports on activities, the mandate and methods of work to the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly.

More information on the Special rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Torture/SRTorture/Pages/SRTortureIndex.aspx>

7 – THE OTHER SPECIAL RAPPOORTEURS

There are also Special rapporteurs on contemporary forms of slavery, on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living and on the right to non-discrimination in this context, on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes, on violence against women...

It is important that physicians keep an eye on published reports and act to enforce the recommendations made by the Rapporteurs.

APPENDIX

Appendix 1 – List of thematic special procedures sending urgent appeals and letters of allegation¹:

- Working Group on enforced or involuntary disappearances
- Working Group on arbitrary detention
- Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions
- **Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment**
- Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of religion or belief
- Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography
- Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression
- Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance
- Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers
- **Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences**
- Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights of migrants
- Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the situation of human rights defenders
- **Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living**
- **Special Rapporteur on the right to education**
- **Special Rapporteur on the right to food**
- Special Rapporteur on the adverse effects of the illicit movement and dumping of toxic and dangerous products and wastes on the enjoyment of human rights
- **Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health**
- **Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially in women and children**
- Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous peoples

¹ In bold, special rapporteurs related to the health

Appendix 2 – Your means of action to denounce the violation of a fundamental right

Denunciate the violation of a fundamental right!

To submit a complain, the following minimum information must be provided:

- Identification of the person(s) or organization(s) submitting the communication;
- The full name of the alleged victim(s), their age, sex, and place of residence or origin;
- Identification of as many details as possible (name, age, sex, place of residence or origin) in cases involving a group or community;
- Date and place of incident (approximate, if exact date is not known);
- A detailed description of the circumstances of the incident in which the alleged violation occurred;
- Identification of the alleged perpetrator(s), name(s) if known and/or title/function, and suspected motive;
- Where relevant, specify if steps have been taken at the national level (e.g. have police been contacted, are other national authorities involved, the position - if any - of the Government);
- Where relevant, specify if steps have been taken at the international level (e.g. if other international mechanisms have been activated).

To send your complains:

Fax-> + 41 22 917 90 06

E-mail -> urgent-action@ohchr.org

Postal mail -> Quick Response Desk

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United Nations Office at Geneva

8-14 avenue de la Paix

1211 Geneva 10

Switzerland

More information on this website:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/SP/Pages/Communications.aspx>