

THE CARTER CENTER

**HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS ON THE FRONTLINES OF
FREEDOM**

**OPENING REMARKS BY MS. HINA JILANI,
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positive trends that we were trying to build on, were already there. That's why I think it's very important for us to find the appropriate means to reinforce the frontline for the defense of human rights.

Let me begin by saying that there are several issues and aspects of these phenomena that need our attention. First of all, I think that we have to place more faith in civil society. We have to make sure that all parts of the international community recognize and acknowledge that there is no notion of international community that can be complete without the inclusion of civil society. So, we don't just address states, we address civil society.

Much of what you have been speaking about since the morning is the context in which human rights defenders work. Without this context, it is very difficult to either understand or evaluate the situation of human rights defenders or indeed to find ways and means to deal with the various situations that they confront. The context, therefore, becomes very important. Also, I think it is important for us to realize that human rights violations emerge and emanate from conditions, whether they are political, social, or economic. When human rights defenders choose the strategies in which to confront the situations that they are working on, they have to work with full awareness of the political, economic, and social conditions that affect the environment in which they work.

I have felt, as a human rights defender that human rights work cannot be carried out in isolation. Also, that human rights work cannot be carried out without a

very keen political sense of what you are doing. Therefore, there are so many linkages that we have to be aware of, but we have to be also aware of what kind of relationships we form at what level. What do we get out of those relationships? This is important in the context of what the high commissioner said in the morning with respect to formulating strategies. I think it is very important not to just react but to respond. By respond, I mean to sit back; think about the right strategies, the most effective ways and means of dealing with the situations, dangers, and the threats that we face; and then together, in consultation with each other, with a collective wisdom, select the best means of going forward.

I've also learned in my work as a human rights defender that while it is important to work at the national level, today's world is not an isolated world and you have to be aware of what's happening in your region and what's happening at the international level and the influences that are determining national situations. Therefore, this kind of network at regional and international levels has become very important. We've all learned this in the South Asian region. Because of that, we have spent almost one and a half decades trying to create those very strong networks so that we are able to respond to situations that are influencing the human rights conditions in our part of the world.

I was the first one always to say let's deal with our own situation rather than pointing to somebody in the north and saying they are responsible for what's happening to us. I stick to that. I think it is much more important for us to detect the problems within our own countries

and to deal with those. But, at the same time, when we apply our minds and our energies, we do discover that sometimes these situations can only be helped if we work at the national level but have linkages at the international level, so that we are able to create a support group and some kind of international public opinion on the issues that we are grappling with. This is what I think is also important in the context of reinforcing the frontline.

In this whole scenario that we have been listening to since the morning and the realities that we are confronting right now, we know that one positive thing has come out. That is the emergence of a world public opinion. I think that is of extreme significance for us. The current situation that we are experiencing shows that there are very definite and very real threats to the preservation of the norms of human rights. But, we do not limit our action by just speaking. The essence of advocacy is to influence state conduct and state action. In the process of fulfilling the obligation to protect, we are ignoring and, in many ways, undermining the obligation to respect human rights. I see no evidence that security cannot be insured within the

as long as they become a part of the war
against terror. And for the first time, I

just at national levels, because this is not a national issue; it's a global issue. For this, global strategies will have to be devised. For this purpose, it is so important that organizations like the United Nations develop better capacity to rise to this challenge and stand on the side of those who wish for security