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## Introduction

National Mechanisms for Implementation, Reporting and Follow-up (NMIRFs) are a standing government structure mandated to coordinate the preparation of reports to, and engagement with, international and regional human rights mechanisms, including the UN Treaty Bodies, the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and Special Procedures. It also plays a key role in the follow-up and streamlined implementation process of treaty obligations and recommendations.

NMIRFs emerged in 2012 from a key recommendation of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights' report on treaty body strengthening and resolution 68/268 on *Strengthening and enhancing the effective functioning of the human rights treaty body systems*. This resolution brought to the table a key demand of human rights advocates: that states establish more coordinated and coherent systems for national human rights implementation and reporting, as a key to holding governments accountable for their international human rights obligations.

In 2016, States created *the Group of Friends* to promote the agenda at the Human Rights Council. This is a global network that was officially launched in May 2024 through the "Asuncion Declaration". Additionally, in October of 2024, the 10th Glion Human Rights Dialogue led to the adoption of the Marrakech Guidance Framework (MGF), a guidance document based on international good practices and a reference tool to assist States in establishing and reinforcing effective NMIRFs.

The Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR) has also created space to assist states in developing and strengthening their NMIRF. Most recently, in September 2025, the OHCHR launched a [knowledge hub for NMIRFs](#) that aims to provide concrete tools to help national mechanisms effectively function at the national level, submit timely reports to UN Human Rights Mechanisms and follow up on the recommendations they receive.

Canada has recently undergone reviews through the UPR, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Each of these processes included recommendations for Canada to establish or strengthen an NMIRF, with an emphasis on ensuring meaningful consultation and engagement with CSOs and Indigenous organizations. In response to these recommendations and calls from civil society to develop more meaningful avenues to engage with the implementation of human rights recommendations, Canada has been actively participating in workshops and learning sessions with the OHCHR to deepen its understanding of these mechanisms, meeting other States to learn from their experiences, and building on its existing

structured processes and monitoring systems. This makes the topic especially relevant to Canada's current context.

As more States adopt NMIRFs, there is a growing recognition among states and civil society of the benefits of these systems and the importance of sharing best practices and learnings to continuously improve their efficacy. Following the momentum NMIRFs are gaining globally and the collective call from Canadian civil society for improved human rights engagement processes, a group of Canadian CSOs organized a learning series to better understand the roles of CSOs and government in establishing, strengthening, and engaging with an NMIRF in Canada. The learning series brought together experts from around the world to exchange knowledge and share best practices, exploring strategies for effective collaboration among jurisdictions and meaningful engagement with civil society to implement, monitor, and follow up on international human rights recommendations.

This report will highlight the main elements discussed during the learning series and share best practices and the following action steps that CSOs and the government in Canada need to follow to build a strong NMIRF that engages diverse stakeholders and advances the implementation of human rights in Canada.

## Why Canada needs to strengthen their NMIRF

Canada has long been recognized globally for its commitment to human rights, actively engaging with UN mechanisms and advocating for international accountability. However, its domestic implementation of human rights obligations remains inconsistent. The current system in Canada presents several challenges. In particular, the absence of a structured process and effective monitoring mechanisms limits meaningful engagement with CSOs and reduces opportunities for collaboration with the government.

These concerns have been raised not only by Canadian CSOs but also through repeated recommendations from treaty bodies and other UN member states, all of which urge Canada to establish a stronger, more coordinated standing mechanism. This reflects a growing international consensus on the importance of institutionalizing national-level human rights implementation.

A central challenge in Canada lies in the weak oversight structure. First, the lack of a statutory mandate means that compliance with international human rights recommendations is not subject to any formal accountability process. Second, the fragmented structure and weak government coordination amongst the federal, provincial, territorial and municipal governments create a lack of transparency and barriers to achieving human rights implementation<sup>1</sup>. This lack of clarity and coordination results in a lack of engagement with stakeholders, including CSOs, the Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC), and human rights defenders. Lastly, due to a weak mandate and a lack of clarity, this results in a loss of political will, prioritization, and resources.

CSOs and human rights defenders have expressed growing frustration with this lack of transparency and meaningful collaboration. Many feel that engagement processes are largely performative rather than

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<sup>1</sup> Ho, J. et al, 2025. [Strengthening Canada's implementation, reporting, and follow-up for international human rights commitments.](#)

genuinely participatory, weakening the overall system and contributing to persistent gaps in meeting Canada's international obligations. While various CSO coalitions are actively advocating for a stronger NMIRF, these efforts are often undermined by limited communication between coalitions and by government consultation spaces that remain restrictive. Local and grassroots organizations, in particular, are frequently left out, and the government's reliance on a non-public list of CSO contacts further narrows participation.

*Canada has been urged through repeated recommendations from treaty bodies and other UN states to establish a stronger, more coordinated NMIRF*

Strengthening its NMIRF would make Canada more effective in reporting to treaty bodies, enforcing domestic and international human rights commitments, and collaborating with CSOs and human rights defenders. Without such reform, the implementation gap will continue to erode Canada's international credibility and, more importantly, hinder the full realization of human rights for people within the country. Becoming a true champion of human rights requires improving domestic practices, not only promoting rights abroad.

Canada is not alone in facing these challenges. Governments around the world grapple with similar issues, and through the OHCHR's Group of Friends, states have been sharing best practices to support more effective national mechanisms. During the learning series, contributions from Brazil, Portugal, Switzerland, and others highlighted practical approaches and reinforced the importance of genuine cooperation between governments and civil society.

## Challenges that could be encountered:

Challenges in setting up and engaging with NMIRFs are broad and vary across countries, depending on their political context and resources. Additionally, these challenges differ significantly for States and CSOs.

### *Challenges for States*

Common challenges discussed during the learning series include fragmentation and siloed approaches across sectors and levels of government. Limited resources, whether time, funding, or staffing, further constrain coordinated action, making it difficult for institutions to sustain the work required for meaningful follow-up. Monitoring and implementing the vast number of recommendations generated by different international mechanisms remains a significant challenge. Overlaps between monitoring bodies require States to report on similar issues to multiple institutions, creating a substantial administrative burden. In many contexts, insufficient political will weakens efforts to translate international recommendations into concrete domestic measures.

Institutional coordination and continuity pose additional obstacles. It was found that the way a NMIRF is set up matters, as ad hoc systems are ineffective and wasteful of resources compared to a standing mechanism, which can comprehensively and efficiently keep up with each international treaty body, special rapporteur, and recommendation. Weak institutional memory, frequent staff turnover, and the absence of

stable, long-term systems complicate efforts to maintain consistent human rights implementation. The complexity of adopting new legislation, particularly when reforms demand extensive interdepartmental coordination, intensifies these difficulties.

Cases such as Canada and Switzerland illustrate how political structures further shape these challenges. The added complexity of systemic fragmentation, jurisdictional issues, and a dualist legal system makes it challenging to harmonize domestic human rights law. Multiple complex coordination structures with many layers can lose momentum, resources, and willpower, especially since provinces and municipalities don't have the same resources as the federal government. Efficiency challenges need to be considered when strengthening an NMIRF.

### ***Challenges for CSOs***

CSOs face a distinct but closely related set of challenges. Limited resources constrain CSOs' ability to consistently monitor, advocate, and follow up on international recommendations. Weak engagement and alignment between the State and civil society compounds these challenges, reducing opportunities for shared ownership of human rights priorities and diminishing the overall legitimacy of the implementation process.

In many contexts, CSOs struggle to access information on government progress, especially when States lack centralized data systems or transparent reporting mechanisms. Low levels of political will within the State can further discourage civil society's participation, weaken trust and limit constructive dialogue.

In sum, both the State and CSOs operate within a complex ecosystem where structural, political, and resource-related obstacles limit the full and effective implementation of international human rights recommendations. While the challenges differ in nature and intensity, they are deeply interconnected: weaknesses in State coordination undermine CSOs engagement, and limited CSOs capacity reduces pressure and support for government action. Addressing these gaps requires not only improved systems, the incorporation of legislation related to the mechanisms, increased resources, clearer responsibilities, and more substantial political commitment, but also a renewed emphasis on partnership between State institutions and CSOs. Only through sustained cooperation, transparent processes, and adequate resourcing can national human rights implementation become more coherent, efficient, and ultimately impactful.

## Best practices from CSOs and other States

To address challenges and ensure the NMIRF is efficient, Brazil, Portugal, and the OHCHR recommend incorporating the NMIRF into domestic law to fully institutionalize its operation as a standing mechanism. When an NMIRF is backed by legislation, it gains clearer visibility within government structures, more substantial political leverage, and more consistent access to information across ministries. This legitimacy enhances its authority to coordinate the implementation of human rights obligations and increases the likelihood that it will receive adequate resources. Incorporation into national legislation also helps ensure that international commitments are internalized, reducing the risk of policies that conflict with international law.

*Coalitions with CSOs are key to improving coordination, amplifying the voices of underrepresented groups, and strengthening advocacy and legitimacy.*

A legislated NMIRF must be supported by a permanent secretariat. A permanent secretariat provides continuity across political cycles, prevents the loss of institutional memory, maintains consistent relationships with focal points, and ensures efficient coordination, from drafting reports

to organizing consultations. This stability is further strengthened when central ministries, such as the Ministry of Finance, allocate dedicated budgets for human rights programs and policies, helping translate commitments into concrete implementation. Clear terms of reference and well-defined mandate, broad rather than narrow, are essential for establishing the NMIRF's authority and coordination functions across government.

Another best practice is building strong coalitions that unite CSOs, NHRIs, parliaments, and all levels of government. Such coalitions close gaps, improve coordination, amplify the voices of underrepresented groups, and strengthen advocacy and legitimacy. Involving parliament is particularly important, as legislative engagement increases the chances that recommendations requiring legal reform gain traction.

Capacity strengthening is also central to effective NMIRFs. Developing the technical skills needed for planning, monitoring, and implementation ensures more consistent follow-up and strategic coordination. Inclusive policy dialogue, actively engaging affected communities, civil society, and marginalized groups, empowers non-state actors and increases government capacity for inclusive governance. Increased visibility and public access to information, including through regularly updated websites and public reporting, mobilizing NGOs and fostering a broader culture of human rights.

*NMIRFs should be incorporated into domestic law to fully institutionalize their operations... this would give them clearer visibility within government structures, greater political leverage, and more consistent access to information, as well as resources.*

Effective NMIRF models demonstrate strong coordination, information management, and engagement capacities. Practical tools and approaches contribute to this effectiveness. National human rights tracking systems, such as Portugal's National Recommendations Tracking Database (NRTD), and the OHCHR database, which is also used by Portugal and Canada, centralize recommendations, enable transparent allocation of responsibilities, and facilitate systematic follow-up. Canada has begun using a similar NRTD, with the objective of strengthening the monitoring of recommendations and providing more transparent information that civil society can access. Additionally, the OHCHR knowledge hub<sup>2</sup> synthesizes information from NMIRFs worldwide and helps states and CSOs better understand how to implement and strengthen NMIRFs in their own contexts.

Inter-ministerial collaboration, and structured roundtables with NHRIs and civil society further strengthen coordination. The Swiss example, where the NHRI, the federal government, and the Conference of Cantons are working together to clarify roles and responsibilities, illustrates how cooperative design contributes to coherent national implementation systems.

Finally, openness and inclusiveness remain vital. Regular consultations with civil society, standing invitations for Ombudspersons to participate as permanent observers, and transparent communication practices, such as making NMIRF information publicly accessible and available in multiple languages, promote accountability and enhance visibility. Increased visibility ensures that human rights issues remain in the public arena, empowering civil society and reinforcing a national culture of human rights.

Together, these practices demonstrate that a legislated, well-resourced, participatory, and technically capable NMIRF, supported by permanent structures and broad coalitions, is essential for ensuring robust, efficient, and effective implementation of international human rights obligations.

## Next Steps for Canada (government and CSOs)

The panelists shared with us some of the main things CSOs and the Canadian government can do to strengthen NMIRF implementation in the country, including:

- **Mapping Existing Structures and Actors:** Build upon the current foundation of what already exists. It is therefore important to map the structures and ministries, along with all the actors involved in human rights reporting and implementation.
- **Establish a clear Legal Mandate:** A clear mandate needs to be established in law, as this will allow the NMIRF to gain legitimacy, sustainability, and institutional longevity.
- **Integrate SDGs into NMIRF Development:** Use the SDGs as a focal point to develop the NMIRF (e.g., Advocate for someone involved in SDG reporting and follow-up to sit on the NMIRF).
- **Strengthen Multistakeholder Engagement:** It is important for the Government to engage in dialogue and consultation with civil society and other stakeholders to leverage a multisectoral approach to strengthen the current system for reporting and follow-up, and to contribute to the

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<sup>2</sup> <https://knowledgegateway.ohchr.org/nmirf>

national recommendations tracking database (NRTD). A senior and a technical focal point should be appointed to facilitate regular engagement with different partners, including civil society, national human rights institutions and Ombudsmans.

- **Include all levels of Government:** Ensure the different levels of government are included in the NMIRF (municipal, provincial, federal).
- **Co-Create the NMIRFs with Civil Society:** For the State, it is necessary to co-create the NMIRF with civil society and independent stakeholders and design an implementation plan; effectiveness comes from co-ownership.
- **Build a Unified Civil Society Vision:** To overcome internal divisions amongst CSOs and build a shared and strategic vision for what CSOs want from a national mechanism.
- **Institutionalize a Standing, Inclusive Mechanism:** It is essential to establish a standing mechanism and institutionalize it by drafting terms of reference that clarify the role of civil society, secure that space for civil society and other actors (parliamentarians, human rights protection systems, the private sector) and ensure that the mechanism is inclusive.
- **Hold Regular Knowledge-Sharing Events:** Share experiences and learn from similar experiences in other countries and systematize civil society participation.
- **Apply UN Guidance for Effective Mechanisms:** Use the guidance developed by the UN system to ensure a participatory approach, transparency, accountability, and sustainability of these mechanisms.

## Useful Resources:

Various tools and instruments are available through United Nations (UN) entities, such as UNFPA, to support countries in establishing and strengthening these mechanisms. During the discussion, the panellists highlighted several of these valuable resources. Additionally, reports from specific Canadian organizations may prove helpful.

- [Human Rights in Latin America and the Caribbean: social participation in National Implementation, Reporting, and Monitoring Mechanisms \(NMIRFs\) has been a key element.](#)- [Universal Periodic Review \(UPR\) A Practical Guide for Civil Society to Build National Coalitions](#)
- [Partnering with National Mechanisms for Implementation, Reporting and Follow-up \(NMIRFs\): Action on Human Rights Recommendations to Advance Gender Equality and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights.](#)
- [Strengthening Canada's implementation, reporting and follow-up for international human rights commitments](#)
- [OHCHR Knowledge Gateway](#)
- [Discover Canada NMIRF | OHCHR Knowledge Gateway](#)
- [NMIRFs HUB- OHCHR](#)