

**Date: 30 September 2026**  
**Written by Amina Alayout**

## **ACHRS'S statement about the UNGA High-Level Side Event during the 81<sup>st</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly**

On 23 September 2026, the Amman Center for Human Rights Studies (ACHRS), represented by Amina Alayout, followed online the high-level conversation "Human Rights for All – From Commitment to Collective Action". Held during the High-Level Week of the 81<sup>st</sup> session of the UN General Assembly in New York, the event was convened by United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Kingdom of the Netherlands, and Mexico and sponsored by the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, together with Estonia, Liechtenstein, Mexico and the Netherlands. It brought together the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and prominent actors to mobilize people from every region, sector and generation to co-create solutions and build stronger partnerships.

Mr. Volker Türk, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, explained that the Alliance grew out of a shared feeling among human rights actors that they had been pushed onto the defensive, and that it was time to "go on the offensive". He noted that many people, especially young people, feel frustrated, anxious and isolated, yet care deeply about what human rights bring, even without using that language. The Alliance is not meant to be another bureaucratic process, but an initiative to connect communities, broaden the human rights ecosystem and defend protective institutions, including the International Criminal Court, which faces unprecedented attacks.

Looking ahead to the 80th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in December 2028, the High Commissioner set the goal of increasing the number of human rights cities from 120 to 1,000. According to the Guidance Framework published by his Office on 23 July 2025, a human rights city ensures that its laws, policies, public services and procedures are consistent with international human rights standards. The local government develops its own measures and tools to promote, protect and monitor human rights, in partnership with local communities, civil society, academia, human rights institutions and other stakeholders.

Among all speakers, one central idea stood out: human rights are universal and belong to everyone, not theoretical texts produced by and for a privileged few. People experience them, or their absence, in daily life: in their communities, schools, workplaces, at borders and in digital spaces, not in conference rooms.

Mr. Enrique Javier Ochoa Martínez, Undersecretary for Multilateral Affairs and Human Rights of Mexico, called for a shift "from a culture of commitment to a culture of implementation". He identified three essential elements: political will across government, strong and accountable

institutions, and the meaningful participation of affected communities, especially those historically discriminated against. He cited the ongoing consultation with Indigenous and Afro-Mexican peoples to implement the 2024 constitutional reform recognizing them as subjects of public law, and the lifting of more than 13 million people out of multidimensional poverty since 2018, supported by minimum wage increases and stronger labor protections.

Human rights cannot be discussed today without addressing climate change. Ms. Denise Dora, COP30 Presidency Special Envoy for Human Rights and the Just Transition, stressed that climate negotiations must be guided by human rights principles and by the legal obligations states have already accepted under international human rights conventions.

Mr. Amitabh Behar, Executive Director of Oxfam International, paid tribute to the more than 3,000 humanitarian workers killed in conflict zones over the past three years, and to human rights defenders killed for defending land rights, fighting corruption or claiming reproductive rights. Youth interventions highlighted the importance of independent journalism at a time when it is under attack and AI is reshaping information. They called on governments, businesses and civil society to include young people in decision-making and to connect young innovators with financing partners and local communities.

Overall, the discussions reflected a shared concern: the gap between human rights commitments and people's lived realities, at a time when civic space, independent journalism, humanitarian workers and international institutions are under pressure, and when climate change, conflicts and artificial intelligence are creating new challenges. Speakers agreed that the answer lies in concrete implementation, closer to communities, and in the meaningful inclusion of young people.

ACHRS welcomes the launch of the Global Alliance for Human Rights and shares the following recommendations:

First, human rights cannot be fully enjoyed without guaranteeing the most fundamental ones. ACHRS therefore focuses on seven priorities: the right to, the right to think, the right to speak, the right to participation, women's rights, the right to social protection, and youth rights. Many of these echoed the event's discussions, from the abolition of the death penalty in Kazakhstan's new constitution to the defense of independent journalism, gender equality, disability inclusion and youth participation. ACHRS calls on the Alliance to place these rights at the heart of its work.

Second, many young people feel abandoned by a human rights discourse that seems theoretical and distant, and in some countries those who speak out face arrests, prosecutions or intimidation. ACHRS calls on the Alliance and its member states to protect civic space and young human rights defenders, and to turn commitments into concrete, measurable actions visible in young people's daily lives.