

CHRI 2020

HANDBOOK FOR THE **UNDERTRIAL REVIEW COMMITTEE**



**Based on the National Legal Services Authority's
Standard Operating Procedure**

This handbook aims to simplify the process laid out in the NALSA's Standard Operating Procedure on the functioning of Undertrial Review Committees for each stakeholder, enabling them to coordinate well with each other and to ensure effective working of Undertrial Review Committee in their district.



CHRI

Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative
working for the *practical* realisation of human rights in
the countries of the Commonwealth



Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative

The Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) is an independent, non-governmental, non-profit organisation headquartered in New Delhi, with offices in London, United Kingdom, and Accra, Ghana. Since 1987, it has worked for the practical realization of human rights through strategic advocacy and engagement as well as mobilization around these issues in Commonwealth countries. CHRI's specialisation in the areas of Access to Justice (ATJ) and Access to Information (ATI) are widely known. The ATJ programme has focussed on Police and Prison Reforms, to reduce arbitrariness and ensure transparency while holding duty bearers to account. CHRI looks at policy interventions, including legal remedies, building civil society coalitions and engaging with stakeholders. The ATI looks at Right to Information (RTI) and Freedom of Information laws across geographies, provides specialised advice, sheds light on challenging issues, processes for widespread use of transparency laws and develops capacity. CHRI reviews pressures on freedom of expression and media rights while a focus on Small States seeks to bring civil society voices to bear on the UN Human Rights Council and the Commonwealth Secretariat. A growing area of work is SDG 8.7 where advocacy, research and mobilization is built on tackling Contemporary Forms of Slavery and human trafficking through the Commonwealth 8.7 Network.

CHRI has special consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council and is accredited to the Commonwealth Secretariat. Recognised for its expertise by governments, oversight bodies and civil society, it is registered as a society in India, a limited charity in London and an NGO in Ghana.

Although the Commonwealth, an association of 54 nations, provided member countries the basis of shared common laws, there was little specific focus on human rights issues in member countries. Thus, in 1987, several Commonwealth professional associations founded CHRI.

Through its research, reports, advocacy, engagement, mobilisation and periodic investigations, CHRI draws attention to the progress and setbacks on rights issues. It addresses the Commonwealth Secretariat, the United Nations Human Rights Council members, media and civil society. It works on and collaborates around public education programmes, policy dialogues, comparative research, advocacy and networking on the issues of Access to Information and Access to Justice.

CHRI's seeks to promote adherence to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Commonwealth Harare Principles and other internationally recognised human rights instruments, as well as domestic instruments supporting human rights.

International Advisory Commission: Alison Duxbury, Chairperson. Members: Wajahat Habibullah, Joanna Ewart-James, Sam Okudzeto and Sanjoy Hazarika

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Formation of the Undertrial Review Committee

Overwhelmed by the concerns of high undertrial population and overcrowding in prisons, Hon'ble Supreme Court in '*In Re-Inhuman Conditions in 1382 Prisons*', Writ Petition (Civil) No. 406/2013 directed National Legal Services Authority (NALSA), along with Ministry of Home Affairs and State Legal Services Authorities (SLSAs), to ensure formation of Undertrial Review Committees (UTRC) in every district, vide order dated 24th April 2015.



Composition of the Undertrial Review Committee

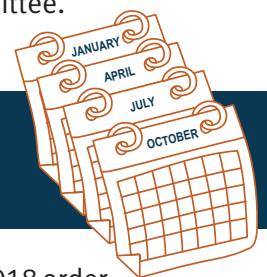


Originally the UTRC as directed by the Supreme Court in its April 2015 order was a three member committee –District Judge as chairman, District Magistrate and Superintendent of Police. Later through the orders dated 31st March 2016 and 31st October 2017, Secretary DLSA and officers in-charge of all prisons in the district were added as members, respectively, for smooth functioning of the committee.



Periodicity of Meeting - Quarterly

The NALSA SOP mandates to hold quarterly meeting of UTRC. However, in the 04th December, 2018 order in '*In Re Inhuman Conditions in 1382 Prisons*', Supreme Court directed the UTRCs to meet every month from January 2019 to June 2019. Later in March, 2020, in the wake of COVID-19 being declared as pandemic, the Supreme Court in '*In Re: Contagion of COVID 19 Virus in Prisons*', Suo Motu Writ Petition (Civil) No. 1/2020, directed the UTRCs to meet once a week. The UTRCs must follow the periodicity as directed from time to time.





Mandate of the Undertrial Review Committee

The Supreme Court order dated 24th April 2015 mandated the UTRCs to review three categories of undertrial prisoners – (i) eligible under Section 436A of Cr.P.C., (ii) undertrials released on bail but unable to furnish security and (iii) undertrials accused of compoundable offences.

Subsequently, through orders dated 5th February 2016 and 6th May 2016, the court expanded the mandate of UTRCs from 3 categories to 14 categories of inmates including convicts, to be reviewed for release (refer Page 6 and 7 of this handbook).



About the NALSA's Standard Operating Procedure on Undertrial Review Committee

In view of the discrepancies found in the functioning of UTRCs, the Hon'ble Supreme Court, through an order dated 31st October 2017, NALSA was asked to prepare a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for smooth functioning of UTRCs towards ensuring that all 14 categories of prisoners get benefit without delay. Pursuant to the order, NALSA formulated the SOP and finally, on 4th December 2018 Supreme Court directed all the States and UTs to adopt and follow NALSA's SOP for UTRCs.

CHRI, through this handbook, aims to assist the various stakeholders to fulfil their respective mandate as part of the UTRC. The SOP also makes some additional suggestions for every High Court/SLSA to consider and implement in their respective state. CHRI believes that these are useful suggestions which, if implemented, would further strengthen the UTRCs. Since CHRI has been monitoring the functioning of UTRCs from its inception and have interacted with stakeholders in many states, the handbook contains some practical recommendations to assist the UTRCs to realise their full potential.



Review Process at a Glance

Preparation

1. Officer in-charge (Jail Superintendent) of every prison in the district prepares list of all undertrials (UTPs) and convicts lodged in the prison.
2. DLSA Secretary shortlists eligible cases of undertrials and convicts based on the 14 categories of prisoners mentioned in the NALSA SOP from the prepared lists to be considered in the UTRC meeting.

Meeting

3. District & Sessions Judge convenes a meeting of all UTRC members where the shortlisted cases are considered by the UTRC.
4. UTRC makes recommendations for release and other actions in the cases of eligible individual prisoners to the concerned court/stakeholder.

Recommendations and Action

5. Jail Superintendent informs prisoners about the recommendations made in their cases.
6. In case of undertrials, trial court decides on the recommendations of the UTRC brought before it in the manner appropriate for the particular case.

Follow-up

7. UTRC keeps a track on the actions taken on the recommendations.
8. DLSA Secretary collates the data and prepares a quarterly report on the recommendations and actions taken in the cases considered by the UTRC.



Duties of Jail¹ Superintendent²

Mandate prescribed by the SOP

- ⚙ **Before the UTRC Meeting**
 - ◆ Prepare two separate lists of Undertrials and Convicts detained in prison as dates- 31st March, 30th June, 30th September and 31st December, in the format provided below. (Step 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 of the SOP)
 - ◆ Both the lists preferably be prepared in soft excel sheet. (Step 1.1 and 1.2 of the SOP)
 - ◆ Send the list to DLSA Secretary by 7 April, 7 July, 7 October and 7 January, respectively (Step 1.3 of the SOP)
- ⚙ **During the UTRC Meeting**
 - ◆ Attend the UTRC meeting. (Definition of UTRC in the SOP)
- ⚙ **After the UTRC Meeting**
 - ◆ Inform the concerned UTPs and Convict about the recommendation made in their case. (Step 3.5 of the SOP)

CHRI's Recommendations

- ⚙ **Before the UTRC Meeting**

As the periodicity of UTRC meeting may change as directed by the competent authority, the timeline to prepare the lists may be decided by the UTRC.

The Jail Superintendent may fill in only those points of the formats for which the information is available in warrant or prison record. The rest of the information must be completed by the office of Secretary, DLSA. (Please refer step 2.1).
- ⚙ **During the UTRC Meeting**

Since Jail Superintendent is the physical custodian of prisoners, s/he would have additional information about prisoners' well-being and therefore should also inform the UTRC during the review of cases:

 - a. if the undertrial is granted bail and can afford lesser surety amount
 - b. if the undertrial is sick or infirm or require specialized medical treatment
 - c. if the undertrial is undergoing medical treatment for serious or prolonged illness
 - d. if the undertrial needs mental health assessment by the concerned court under the CrPC provisions
 - e. if the convict is granted due remission for good conduct and work done
 - f. any other relevant information

A. Information to be included in Undertrial's List (Annexure A of the SOP)

1. Name of the UTP
2. Father's name
3. Gender / Age
4. FIR/Crime No.
5. Police Station
6. District
7. Arrested under section-
8. Particulars of the Court
9. Date of Arrest
10. Date of First Remand
11. Date of admission in prison
12. Date of filing charge sheet
13. Chargesheeted under Section-
14. UTP represented by Legal

- Aid/Private Lawyer
15. Name of the lawyer with contact details, if available
16. Whether bail has been granted to the accused, if so when
17. If accused is not released on bail despite grant of bail, reason for the same, if available
18. If the UTP suffering from any disease, mental or physical, details regarding the same
19. Whether UTP is a convict/Under trial in any other case
20. If yes, separate entry in the data sheet be made qua the additional Case

B. Information to be included in Convict's List (Annexure B of the SOP)

1. Name of the Convict
2. Father's Name
3. FIR No.
4. Police Station
5. District
6. Name of the Trial Court
7. Date of Conviction
8. Duration & Nature of Sentence
9. Total Remission Earned
10. Date when sentence completed
11. Reason for Non-Release
12. Whether case considered by Sentence Review Board?
13. Reason for not granting pre-mature release
14. Additional information or Remark

¹ "Jail" means Central Jail, District Jail, Sub Jail, Women Jail, Special Jail and borstals as per the definition given in the SOP.

² "Jail Superintendent" includes Deputy Superintendent and Officer Incharge of the jail as per the definition given in the SOP.



Duties of Secretary, District Legal Services Authority³

Mandate prescribed by the SOP



Before the UTRC Meeting

- ◆ The office of Secretary, DLSA, with the aid of empaneled panel lawyers, Retired Judicial Officers and law students trained as PLVs, if required and available, shall draw list of UTPs/Convicts eligible for consideration by the UTRC out of Data sent to him in the light of criteria laid down by Hon'ble Supreme Court in **WP(C) 406/2013-Re-Inhuman Conditions in 1382 Prisons** and laid out in para 2.2 of the NALSA SOP (See page no. 6 and 7 of this handbook). If any further details are required by the Secretary, DLSA from any court or from the Jail Superintendent or from the police authorities, the same may be ascertained by the Secretary DLSA. (Step 2.1)
- ◆ Thereafter, the Secretary DLSA shall prepare a list of eligible UTPs for consideration of UTRC in the Excel Sheet/Soft form as per Annexure A & B. This list has to be prepared in an excel sheet in soft form. (Step 2.1)
- ◆ Inform the District & Sessions Judge that the complete list has been prepared and request him to convene the UTRC meeting at the earliest. (Step 2.3)
- ◆ Share a copy of the list with the District & Sessions Judge and other members of the UTRC so that they can come prepared for the meeting. (Step 2.3)



During the UTRC Meeting

- ◆ Attend the UTRC meeting (Definition of UTRC in the SOP)
- ◆ Enter the recommendations for release and appropriate action in cases of UTPs in the digital list of prisoners with:
 - a. Recommendation of UTRC
 - b. Date of recommendation
 - c. Brief reasons for UTRC recommendation



After the UTRC Meeting

- ◆ Share recommendations with the concerned Trial Court/Jail Superintendent and Secretary, DLSA. (Step 3.5)
- ◆ Instruct the panel lawyers to move applications as required in the UTRC recommendations for legal aid cases. (Step 3.4)
- ◆ Keep track of the follow up action in recommended cases and collate data on:
 - a. Action taken on recommendation
 - b. Final Outcome
 - c. Date of release of UTP/Convict. (Step 4).
- ◆ Generate quarterly report under the following heads:
 1. Number of UTPs / Convicts considered by UTRCs in a given quarter / year
 2. Number of UTPs/Convicts recommended for bail/release.
 3. Number of bail/other applications moved post recommendations
 4. Number of inmates released pursuant to UTRC's recommendations. (Step 5).

CHRI's Recommendations



Before the UTRC Meeting

- ◆ Any information missing in the list and not available with the Jail Superintendent should be ascertained by the Secretary DLSA. Secretary DLSA should ensure the shortlisting of cases is complete within a week of receiving the lists from Jail Superintendent.
- ◆ Secretary, DLSA should also ensure that the lists of inmates sent by the Jail Superintendents are segregated jurisdiction wise by his office. The details of inmates falling under the jurisdiction of any other DLSA must be sent to them immediately. Similarly, other cases referred by other DLSAs falling under the concerned DLSA must be included in the list for review.
- ◆ Secretary DLSA should not exclude any eligible case from the shortlisted UTPs and Convicts even if that particular case has previously been rejected by the UTRC or by the trial court after UTRC's recommendation for any reason.



During the UTRC Meeting

- ◆ Assist the UTRC in recommending the cases for appropriate action as provided in the SOP (Refer page no. 6 and 7 of this handbook).
- ◆ Since the SOP only mentions that this task be done by 'the UTRC' and do not specify the stakeholder, CHRI recommends that it must be undertaken by the Secretary, DLSA.



After the UTRC Meeting

- ◆ Since the SOP only mentions that this task be done by 'the UTRC' and do not specify the stakeholder, CHRI recommends that it must be undertaken by the Secretary, DLSA.
- ◆ The Secretary DLSA should maintain a collated data sheet including all of the above mentioned information, in separate excel sheets for each UTRC meeting. This single consolidated data sheet may also be used by the Secretary while preparing quarterly report.

³ "Secretary DLSA" means Secretary of the concerned District Legal Services Authority appointed u/s 9(3) of Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987 and any other officer officiating as Secretary as per the definition given in the SOP.



Role of District Magistrate

The District Magistrate (DM) is the administrative head of the district and the entire administration of the district works directly or indirectly under his supervision and control. In relation to prisons, the DM discharges his powers and duties as provided by the prison rules and acts as the ex-officio visitor of the prisons in his district. He is also responsible for making regular visits to the prison to ensure that prison conditions are humane and provisions of the state prison rules are complied with. He is generally empowered to issue orders to ensure the effective working of the prison administration. Under his order as Executive Magistrate, persons are also detained under Chapter VIII of the CrPC, i.e. u/s 107, 108, 109 and 151 for keeping peace and good behaviour. Review of such cases are mandated.






Role of Superintendent of Police

The Superintendent of Police (SP) is the policing head of the district and is mainly responsible for the maintenance of law and order. Apart from his main policing functions, the investigation officers in the police stations under him are mandated to file chargesheet within 60/90/180 days, as the case may be. Another important task is to ensure the availability of police escorts to ensure that every undertrial reaches court in a timely manner on the date specified by the court warrant that asks for his appearance. This requires coordination with the prison authorities and a police presence at the UTRC is intended to facilitate this.



Role of District and Sessions Judge as the Chairperson of the UTRC

Mandate prescribed by the SOP

-  **Before the UTRC Meeting**
 - ◆ Convene the UTRC meeting as soon as information on completion of list from the Secretary, DLSA is received. (Step 3.1).
-  **During the UTRC Meeting**
 - ◆ As the Chairperson of the UTRC, the District and Session Judge would be responsible* to ensure that recommendation for release or appropriate action in cases of prisoners are entered as follows:
 - Recommendation of UTRC
 - Date of Recommendation
 - Brief reasons for UTRC recommendation (Step 3.4).
-  **After the UTRC Meeting**
 - ◆ As the chairperson of the UTRC, the District and Session Judge would be responsible* to ensure that the recommendations are shared with the Trial Court, Jail Superintendent and Secretary, DLSA. (Step 3.5).
 - ◆ As the chairperson of the UTRC, the District and Session Judge would be responsible* to ensure that a follow up of recommendations is entered as follows:
 - Action taken on recommendation
 - Final outcome
 - Date of release of UTP/ Convict (Step 4)

* Since the SOP does not attribute these tasks/processes to a particular member of the Committee, it is assumed that the District and Session Judge would have the overall responsibility to ensure the implementation of the same.

CHRI's Recommendations

- Before the UTRC Meeting**

A day/date should be fixed by the UTRC to hold the meeting based on the periodicity directed by the competent authority so that the stakeholders are prepared in advance. For example, first Saturday of the month/ 10th of the month/ every Friday/ etc.

After the UTRC Meeting

The District and Session Judge may direct all district courts in the jurisdiction to adopt the 'Custody Warrant' (Page no. 8-9) which also includes changes in the offences during all the stages of pre-trial and trial proceedings. This shall ensure that no prisoner is left out from the eligibility for the UTRC consideration because of change in the offence he/she is charged for or is arrested for. (Additional Suggestion by NALSA as part of the SOP).



List of Recommendations that may be made by the UTRC in individual cases



UTPs covered under Section 436A, Cr.P.C. completed half or more than maximum punishment prescribed for the offence

Recommend the Trial Court to consider release on bail if no special reasons to deny bail.



UTPs not able to furnish securities for the bail given to them

Recommend the Trial Court to reduce the bail amount on application of the lawyer under section 440, Cr.P.C. if UTP is not able to furnish bail due to poverty or release on personal bond



UTPs accused of compoundable offences

Recommend the Trial Court to consider if the offence can be compounded as per law



UTPs eligible under Section 436, Cr.P.C.

Recommend the Trial Court to consider release on personal bond if bail bond is not furnished within seven days of the bail order



UTPs either covered under Section 3 of the Probation of Offenders Act (PO Act) or accused of offences under Section 379, 380, 381, 404, 420 IPC or an offence where imprisonment is of less than two years

Recommend the Trial Court to consider invoking the provisions of the P.O. Act or allow plea bargaining as the case appropriates



Convicts who have completed their sentence or are entitled to be released on remission granted to them

Recommend the Officer-in-Charge of the prison to look into the matter so that the prisoner may be released as soon as possible



UTPs of unsound mind

Recommend the Trial Court to consider taking appropriate steps in accordance with Chapter XXV of the code and provide adequate treatment



UTPs eligible to be released on bail u/s 167(2)(a)(i) & (ii) of the Code read with Section 36A of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985 (where persons accused of Section 19 or Section 24 or Section 27A or for offences involving commercial quantity) and where investigation is not completed in 60/90/180 days

Recommend the Trial Court for considering release of accused where charge-sheet is not submitted within statutory time frame



UTPs imprisoned for offences which carry a maximum punishment of 2 years

Recommend the Trial Court to consider release of such UTPs on bail



UTPs who are detained under Chapter VIII of the Cr.P.C. i.e. u/s 107, 108, 109 and 151 of Cr.P.C.

Recommend the Executive/District Magistrate to consider release/discharge such UTPs with or without conditions or to reduce the security or to time for which security is required



UTPs who are sick or infirm or require specialized medical treatment

Recommend the Trial Court to consider granting bail on medical ground under Section 437 Cr.P.C. even for a temporary period



Women UTPs

Recommend the Trial Court to consider the release of women UTPs not accused of serious offences on bail under section 437 Cr.P.C., especially if they are first time offenders and other suitable measures as directed by the Court in R.D. Upadhyay vs State of A.P. and Ors. (AIR 2006 SC 1946)



UTPs who are first time offenders between the ages 19 and 21 years and in custody for the offence punishable with less than 7 years of imprisonment and have suffered at least 1/4th of the maximum sentence possible

Recommend the Trial Court to consider granting bail and if such a person is found guilty then benefit under section 3 & 4 of the Probation of Offenders Act may be given



UTPs eligible for release under Section 437(6) of Cr.P.C, wherein in a case triable by a Magistrate, the trial of a person accused of any non-bailable offence has not been concluded within a period of 60 days from the first date fixed for taking evidence in the case

Recommend the Trial Court to consider granting bail under section 437(6), Cr.P.C.



Additional Suggestion by NALSA

It is suggested in the SOP that UTRC shall look into the individual cases so as to ascertain as to why a particular criminal trial is not getting concluded in a reasonable time and may include to also look at:

- Non-compliance of section 41 of Cr.P.C.
- Non-production of UTPs because logistical issues either in physical or VC production.
- Delay caused by inter-state transfer of UTPs.
- Non filing of FSL/CFSL report in time.
- Failure of police in producing public and expert witnesses.
- Delay caused due to transfer of investigation witnesses and documents.
- Non-availability of PPs in the courts.
- Distribution of criminal cases in different courts in the district.
- Delay caused by paucity of court staff.
- Delay caused by lack of efficiency in the administrative set-up of the court.
- IT infrastructural needs of the lower courts.
- Popularise ADR methods and Plea Bargaining for quick disposal of cases.
- Segregation of trial where co-accused(s) is/are absconding.
- Availability of effective legal aid services.
- Co-operation from the Bar for expediting trial.
- Any other factor leading to delay in trials in the district.

Custody Warrant

Jail No. _____

Name		FIR No.	
Father's Name		U/s (as per FIR)	
Age		Arrested U/S	
Gender		Police Station	
Address		District	
Nationality		Date of Arrest	

PHOTO
OF
INMATE

REMAND DURING INVESTIGATION

Advocate.....(Pvt./Legal Aid)

Sl. No.	Date	Remand Order by Ld. Judge/Next date in the Court
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		

- **Date of Filling Charge Sheet:**
- **Offences against the Accused:**

REMAND AFTER FILLING CHARGE SHEET

Advocate.....(Pvt./Legal Aid)

Sl. No.	Date	Remand Order by Ld. Judge/Next date in the Court
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		

- **Date of Committal in Sessions trial cases:**
- **Date of Framing of Charge:**
- **Charge framed under offences:**

REMAND DURING PROSECUTION EVIDENCE

Advocate.....(Pvt./Legal Aid)

Sl. No.	Date	Remand Order by Ld. Judge/Next date in the Court
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		

REMAND DURING STATEMENT OF ACCUSED

Advocate..... (Pvt./Legal Aid)

Sl. No.	Date	Remand Order by Ld. Judge/Next date in the Court
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		

REMAND DURING DEFENSE EVIDENCE

Advocate..... (Pvt./Legal Aid)

Sl. No.	Date	Remand Order by Ld. Judge/Next date in the Court
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		

REMAND DURING FINAL ARGUMENTS

Advocate..... (Pvt./Legal Aid)

Sl. No.	Date	Remand Order by Ld. Judge/Next date in the Court
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		

- **Result of Trial** :
- **Judgement Pronounced on** :
- **If Convicted, offences convicted under :**
- **Sentence imposed** : (Attach separate sheet)
- **Compensation awarded to victim** : (Attach separate sheet)

CHRI PROGRAMMES

CHRI seeks to hold the Commonwealth and its member countries to high of human rights, transparent democracies and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). CHRI specifically works on strategic initiatives and advocacy on human rights, Access to Justice and Access to Information. Its research, publications, workshops, analysis, mobilisation, dissemination and advocacy, informs the following principal programmes:

1. Access to Justice (ATI)*

***Police Reforms:** In too many countries the police are seen as an oppressive instrument of state rather than as protectors of citizens' rights, leading to widespread rights violations and denial of justice. CHRI promotes systemic reform so that the police act as upholders of the rule of law rather than as enforcers of a regime. CHRI's programme in India and South Asia aims at mobilising public support for police reforms and works to strengthen civil society engagement on the issues. In Tanzania and Ghana, CHRI examines police accountability and its connect to citizenry.

***Prison Reforms:** CHRI's work in prisons looks at increasing transparency of a traditionally closed system and exposing malpractices. Apart from highlighting systematic failures that result in overcrowding and unacceptably long pre-trial detention and prison overstay, it engages in interventions and advocacy for legal aid. Changes in these areas can spark improvements in the administration of prisons and conditions of justice.

2. Access to Information

***Right to Information:** CHRI's expertise on the promotion of Access to Information is widely acknowledged. It encourages countries to pass and implement effective Right to Information (RTI) laws. It routinely assists in the development of legislation and has been particularly successful in promoting Right to Information laws and practices in India, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Ghana and Kenya. In Ghana, CHRI as the Secretariat for the RTI civil society coalition, mobilised the efforts to pass the law; success came in 2019 after a long struggle. CHRI regularly critiques new legislation and intervenes to bring best practices into governments and civil society knowledge both at a time when laws are being drafted and when they are first being implemented. It has experience of working in hostile environments as well as culturally varied jurisdictions, enabling CHRI bring valuable insights into countries seeking to evolve new RTI laws.

***Freedom of Expression and Opinion -- South Asia Media Defenders Network (SAMDEN):** CHRI has developed a regional network of media professionals to address the issue of increasing attacks on media workers and pressure on freedom of speech and expression in South Asia. This network, the South Asia Media Defenders Network (SAMDEN) recognises that such freedoms are indivisible and know no political boundaries. Anchored by a core group of media professionals who have experienced discrimination and intimidation, SAMDEN has developed approaches to highlight pressures on media, issues of shrinking media space and press freedom. It is also working to mobilise media so that strength grows through collaboration and numbers. A key area of synergy lies in linking SAMDEN with RTI movements and activists.

3. International Advocacy and Programming

Through its flagship Report, Easier Said Than Done, CHRI monitors the compliance of Commonwealth member states with human rights obligations. It advocates around human rights challenges and strategically engages with regional and international bodies including the UNHRC, Commonwealth Secretariat, Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group and the African Commission for Human and People's Rights. Ongoing strategic initiatives include advocating for SDG 16 goals, SDG 8.7 (see below), monitoring and holding the Commonwealth members to account and the Universal Periodic Review. We advocate and mobilise for the protection of human rights defenders and civil society spaces.

4. SDG 8.7: Contemporary Forms of Slavery

Since 2016, CHRI has pressed the Commonwealth to commit itself towards achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Target 8.7, to 'take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms.' In July 2019 CHRI launched the Commonwealth 8.7 Network, which facilitates partnerships between grassroots NGOs that share a common vision to eradicate contemporary forms of slavery in Commonwealth countries. With a membership of approximately 60 NGOs from all five regions, the network serves as a knowledge-sharing platform for country-specific and thematic issues and good practice, and to strengthen collective advocacy.



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