

implementation and review of those policies.<sup>13</sup> All UN organs responsible for examining reports currently require states to indicate whether the contents of reports have been publicly debated.<sup>14</sup> The participation of civil society, noted the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, is “at least equally useful” as UN review of the report itself.<sup>15</sup>

The *Declaration on Human Rights Defenders*, recently adopted by the UN General Assembly,<sup>16</sup> provides a broad framework for the active involvement of civil society institutions in the advancement of human rights, including monitoring and reporting on the implementation of international human rights. The Declaration acknowledges “the valuable work” of civil society in contributing to the effective elimination of all violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms.<sup>17</sup> It also states that promoting respect for human rights at the national and international levels is a right (and indeed a responsibility) for groups, associations and individuals.<sup>18</sup> Insofar as civil society participation is concerned, the most salient provisions of the Declaration, perhaps, are those which spell out the right of everyone, “individually and in association with others”, to pursue certain domestic activities, while imposing corresponding obligations on states. Article 6 provides that:

“6. Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others:

(a) To know, seek, obtain, receive and hold information about all human rights and fundamental freedoms, including having access to information as to how those rights and freedoms are given effect in domestic legislative, judicial or administrative systems;

<sup>13</sup> U.N. COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS, *General Comment (No 1) on Reports Submitted by State Parties*, Economic and Social Council Document E/1989/22, para. 5.

<sup>14</sup> *General Guidelines on Part I of Reports Submitted by State Parties*, in *Manual on Human Rights Reporting* (*supra*, note 7), para. 4

<sup>15</sup> U.N. COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS, *supra* (note 13).

<sup>16</sup> The Declaration is the mercifully abbreviated name of a document officially called *Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms*, General Assembly Resolution 53/144, U.N. Doc. A/RES/53/144.

<sup>17</sup> *Declaration on Human Rights Defenders* (Preamble, 4<sup>th</sup> paragraph).

<sup>18</sup> *Id.* (Preamble, 8<sup>th</sup> paragraph).