

Voices at Risk: State-Civil Society Relations in the Development and Implementation of Canada's Guidelines on Supporting Human Rights Defenders

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This article reflects the results of preliminary research on the development and implementation of Voices at Risk: Canada's Guidelines on Supporting Human Rights Defenders by Global Affairs Canada. This article reviews and analyzes the results of two Access to Information and Privacy Requests sent to Global Affairs Canada Headquarters and the Embassy of Canada to the Philippines, which demonstrate the contribution and engagement of Canadian civil society organizations with the guidelines.

This article seeks to make several contributions to the Canadian foreign policy literature. The first contribution it makes is virtue of being the only scholarly publication that explores Voices at Risk at this time. Second, it documents challenges faced at both GAC headquarters and the Embassy of Canada to the Philippines in the development and implementation of the guidelines, notably in relation to their implementation of business and human rights principles. Third, the article describes some of the activities that Canadian CSOs have undertaken to support the development and implementation of the guidelines, noting that engagement between CSOs and GAC officials has been thin. The article concludes by setting a forward-looking research agenda that will seek to understand the origins and development of the guidelines in more detail, and identify civil society priorities for the ongoing protection of the human rights defenders with whom they collaborate.

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The majority of the research, including the ATIPs and policy review, for this article were conducted in 2021 and 2022. The article's contents were up to date for that period. Future research could explore how the implementation of the guidelines has evolved since in policy and practice.

Cet article reflète les résultats d'une recherche préliminaire sur le développement et la mise en œuvre de Voix à risque : Lignes directrices du Canada pour le soutien des défenseurs des droits de la personne par Affaires mondiales Canada. Il examine et analyse les résultats de deux demandes d'accès à l'information et de protection des renseignements personnels envoyées au siège d'Affaires mondiales Canada et à l'ambassade du Canada aux Philippines, qui démontrent la contribution et l'engagement des organisations de la société civile canadienne envers des lignes directrices.

Cet article vise à apporter plusieurs contributions à la littérature sur la politique étrangère canadienne. Premièrement, il s'agit de la première publication académique qui explore Voix à risque. Deuxièmement, il documente les défis rencontrés tant au siège d'Affaires mondiales Canada qu'à l'ambassade du Canada aux Philippines dans le développement et la mise en œuvre des lignes directrices, notamment en ce qui concerne l'application des principes relatifs aux affaires et aux droits de la personne. Troisièmement, il décrit certaines des activités entreprises par les OSC canadiennes pour soutenir le développement et la mise en œuvre des lignes directrices, tout en notant que l'engagement entre les OSC et les responsables d'Affaires mondiales Canada a été limité. L'article conclut en proposant un programme de recherche prospectif visant à mieux comprendre les origines et le développement des lignes directrices, ainsi qu'à identifier les priorités de la société civile pour la protection continue des défenseurs des droits de la personne avec lesquels elle collabore.

I. Introduction

In late September 2019, I visited Baguio in the Cordillera Region of the Philippines as part of a partnership visit for my role as a Global Partnerships Coordinator at KAIROS Canada. While we were there, we met with the wife, daughter and colleagues of Brandon Lee, an American working with the Ifugao Peasant Movement to support human rights in the region. After being declared an enemy of the state for his work on human rights, Brandon was left critically injured after being shot in the face four times at close range in front of his daughter by masked assailants riding motorcycles.¹ On the day we met, his daughter vacillated between despair and preparing paper cranes, hoping to reach one thousand so that her wish for her father's recovery could be granted. His wife worried about whether her husband would survive his injuries and, if he did, what his quality of life might be.

Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) act through local, national and international networks to promote human rights, relying on a "complex constellation of global norms and local knowledge."² They work in complex environments in which they seek to shape and exercise power within, to transform human rights agency, but their work can also affect them negatively as a result of violence and oppression.³

Unfortunately, Brandon's story is not unique. The safety and well-being of HRDs that I have worked with in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Palestine, India and elsewhere in the Philippines have also been jeopardized by their work, through direct threats from the state, armed groups and international corporations. Between 2015 and 2019, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights estimated that 1,323 HRDs had been killed globally, not including forced disappearances.⁴ Globally, HRDs face shrinking civil society space, increasing threats and reprisals for their work. This is undertaken by criminalizing protest, often

¹ Carmela Fonbuena, "Philippines: US rights volunteer branded 'enemy of state' shot outside home", *The Guardian* (8 August 2019), online: <theguardian.com> [perma.cc/P7JA-6JSZ].

² Luis Enrique Eguren Fernández & Champa Patel, "Towards developing a critical and ethical approach for better recognising and protecting human rights defenders" (2015) 19:7 Intl JHR 896 at 898.

³ *Ibid* at 904.

⁴ Mary Lawlor, *Final warning: death threats and killings of human rights defenders: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders*, UN HRC, 46th sess, No 3, A/HRC/46/35, (2021), 1 at 6.

through anti-terror legislation. Bennett et al. note that the International Centre for Not-for-Profit Law documented the introduction of measures to constrain civil society in more than fifty countries between 2012 and 2014, citing HRDs and NGOs as impediments to economic growth and threats to national economic security.⁵

While states bear the primary responsibility for protecting HRDs within their jurisdiction, there is growing international legal architecture that promotes efforts by foreign embassies and national and international human rights institutions to offer support and protection in the countries where they operate. One of the earliest such mechanisms was the development of guidelines for staff at foreign missions and embassies in the countries where they are located, which is encouraged by UN General Assembly Resolution 53/144. Canada published its original guidelines, *Voices at Risk, Canada's Guidelines on Supporting Human Rights Defenders (Voices at Risk)*, on December 10, 2016, and introduced a revised version in June 2019.⁶ They were introduced well after other guidelines globally, and there is little information about how they were developed or why they were released when they were. However, Canadian civil society organizations (CSOs) have seized the new guidelines as an opportunity to advocate for the protection of their partners working as HRDs internationally.

A. Research Problem and Methods

This article represents the results of the preliminary phase of an ongoing research project on *Voices at Risk*, its development as a policy and how it engages local HRDs and peacebuilders globally, including their civil society partners in Canada. I did not learn about the guidelines in academic contexts, but through working as a human rights practitioner with several Canadian CSOs between 2018 and 2022. I was intrigued by how frequently staff at these organizations would appeal to the guidelines to promote the protection of HRDs in the Philippines, India, Colombia and elsewhere. Meanwhile, none of the broader academic, political or bureaucratic foreign

⁵ Karen Bennett et al, "Critical perspectives on the security and protection of human rights defenders" (2015) 19:7 Intl JHR 883 at 883.

⁶ Global Affairs Canada, "Voices at Risk: Canada's Guideline on Supporting Human Rights Defenders" (Ottawa: Global Affairs Canada, 2019) [*Voices at Risk*, (2019)].

policy networks that I participated in were engaging with the guidelines at all.

In 2021, I conducted two Access to Information and Privacy (ATIP) requests to gain insight into how the policies were developed and were being implemented by Canadian embassies, in addition to how they related to the efforts of local peacebuilders. The first ATIP was submitted to the Embassy of Canada to the Philippines in March 2021, and the results were received in March of 2022. The contents of that ATIP include all correspondence and policy documents from within the embassy related to *Voices at Risk* between 2016 and 2021. The majority of the documents in the file are correspondence originating from embassy staff. The second ATIP was submitted to Global Affairs Canada (GAC) Headquarters in April 2021, and the results were received in September 2021. The contents of this ATIP included all policy documents related to the guidelines developed at GAC Headquarters between 2016 and 2021. I had also requested correspondence as part of this request, but they were removed at the request of the relevant ATIP officer due to concerns about the volume of documents that would be included. Subsequent research will be undertaken to further explore the development and implementation of the guidelines through interviews with GAC Headquarters staff and in collaboration with Canadian CSOs.

A thorough initial review of both files revealed the significant role that Canadian CSOs played in the development and implementation of *Voices at Risk*, which corresponds to the frequency with which I observed it being used in professional settings. However, the extent to which civil society engagement was represented in both ATIP requests was surprising. More than half of the documents provided by the Canadian Embassy to the Philippines consisted of correspondence, meeting requests and reports from Canadian CSOs drawing attention to the need to protect human rights defenders in the Philippines. There was also substantial content related to Canadian CSOs in the policy documents produced after 2019 provided by GAC.

As a result, I undertook qualitative textual analysis of both ATIPs to explore several themes related to the engagement of Canadian CSOs by GAC Headquarters staff and the Canadian Embassy to the Philippines to understand how they were engaged in the development and implementation of *Voices at Risk*. In addition to describing some of the methods used by Canadian CSOs to engage GAC staff, the results demonstrate how decisions made by staff at GAC Headquarters limited the

potential impact of CSO input in the revised 2019 guidelines. Moreover, they demonstrate how capacity limitations of embassy staff in Manila undermined requests from Canadian CSOs for support for HRDs with whom they worked in partnership across the Philippines.

The results of this article should be relevant both to civil society practitioners and to the academic literature on Canadian foreign policy on human rights. First, this article demonstrates the challenges in developing and implementing *Voices at Risk* both at GAC Headquarters and at the Embassy of Canada to the Philippines. These challenges include meaningful engagement with CSOs, a shortage of financing and evaluation strategies within the guidelines, and a lack of training and support for embassy staff. It also documents a specific challenge related to the application of business and human rights principles by embassy staff in relation to the guidelines.

This information may be useful in helping CSOs refine their strategies when advocating support for their partners. Second, it provides new evidence of how Canadian CSOs have organized around this specific human rights policy and suggests the nature of state-civil society relations in relation to foreign policy under the government of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, which gained a majority in late 2015 and retained a minority government in 2019. To conclude, I point to the many areas for future research arising out of this preliminary analysis. This is not a conclusion, rather a beginning meant to inspire others to pursue further research.

II. Human Rights in Canadian Foreign Policy

Canadian engagement with human rights through its foreign policy was constrained until the 1970s. While there is limited historical documentation of Canadian engagement in international human rights prior to the Second World War,⁷ Clement notes that human rights were also not a foreign policy priority in this period, stating:

The country accepted some minor international human rights obligations in the first half of the twentieth century. Canadians attended the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 and signed the Treaty of Versailles, joined the League of Nations, and ratified the

⁷ Stephanie Bangarth & Jennifer Tunnicliffe, "Writing Rights into the 'New' Political History" (2019) 100:4 Can Hist Rev 638.

ILO's conventions in 1935. Nevertheless, Canada was hardly committed to advancing human rights abroad.⁸

Dominique Marshall adds that, as a member of the League of Nations, which had adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Children, Canada demanded the retraction of a report released by the Save the Children International Union on the situation of children in Alberta on the basis of state sovereignty in the 1920s.⁹

During the period immediately following the Second World War, while moving into its own domestic rights revolution, Canada's record was not significantly better. Rather than playing an active role in the drafting of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR), Canadian officials attempted to obstruct its drafting and adoption due to domestic policy concerns.¹⁰ It was the only country outside of the Soviet bloc, Saudi Arabia and South Africa to abstain on a crucial vote that would approve the final draft of the UDHR before its submission to the General Assembly for adoption.¹¹ Ultimately, Canada voted in favour of the UDHR after considerable pressure from the British and American delegations.¹² Moreover, Canada initially opposed the negotiation of the International Covenants on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and Civil and Political Rights between 1948 and 1960, insisting on the need to include a federalism clause to address concerns over integrating the provinces into human rights laws.¹³ Thereafter, Canada ended its efforts to impede the negotiations of the covenants. This change in policy coincided with the emergence of Canada's own rights revolution, spurred by domestic advocacy from growing social movements calling for the development of domestic human rights

⁸ Dominique Clément, "Human Rights in Canadian Domestic and Foreign Politics: From 'Niggardly Acceptance' to Enthusiastic Embrace" (2012) 34 Hum Rts Q 751 at 759.

⁹ Dominique Marshall, "Children's Rights from Below: Canadian and Transnational Actions, Beliefs and Discourses 1900-1989" in David Goutor & Stephen Heathorn, *Taking Liberties: A History of Human Rights in Canada* (Ontario: Oxford University Press, 2013) at 190.

¹⁰ Clément, *supra* note 8 at 775.

¹¹ *Ibid* at 775.

¹² Andrew Lui, *Why Canada Cares: Human Rights and Foreign Policy in Theory and Practice* (Montreal: McGill-Queens' University Press, 2013) at 13.

¹³ Eayrs, James "Canadian Federalism and the United Nations." (1950) 16:1 The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science, 2, 172-183.

protections,¹⁴ embedded in constitutionally enshrined rights.¹⁵ By 1978, "Canada's Secretary of State indicated that international involvement had stimulated Canadian human rights legislation and agencies at the federal and provincial levels."¹⁶

Between 1980 and into the early 2000s, the Canadian government placed "consistently high priority on human rights and democracy in its foreign policy pronouncements."¹⁷ Towards the end of this period, the government integrated its commitment to human rights with its contributions to international security through its efforts to promote the Responsibility to Protect and its doctrine on human security. This reputation was supported by contributions to UN Peace Operations in Haiti, Kosovo, Sudan and Afghanistan.¹⁸ Black indicates that during this period, Canadian foreign policy on human rights was based on three principles: "multilateralism; quiet diplomacy and engagement; and intensified state-societal interactions."¹⁹ He cautions that despite its emphasis on human rights, Canada had a "limited capacity to influence human rights developments and will never entirely escape hypocrisy and contradictions."²⁰

Canada's reputation faltered under the Conservative government from 2006 to 2015, which was rather hostile towards the broad UN human rights agenda. In this period, Canadian international human rights policy "focused narrowly on using the UN to criticize a select few countries, substantially reduced Canadian financial support to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and refused to sign important new UN human rights treaties."²¹ It also faced challenges at the newly created UN Human Rights Council, where it again played an obstructive role, voting against the Council's Institution Building Resolution and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples at the General Assembly

¹⁴ Jennifer Tunnicliffe, "A Limited Vision: Canadian Participation in the Adoption of the International Covenants on Human Rights" in David Goutor & Stephen Heathorn, *Taking Liberties: A History of Human Rights in Canada* (Ontario: Oxford University Press, 2013) at 166–89.

¹⁵ Christopher MacLennan, *Toward the Charter: Canadians and the Demand for a National Bill of Rights, 1929–1960* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2003) at 60–82.

¹⁶ Alison Brysk, *Global Good Samaritans: Human Rights as Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) at 94.

¹⁷ David R Black, "Human Rights in Foreign Policy: Lessons for South Africa from Canadian Experience?" (2001) 5:1 Intl JHR 37 at 38.

¹⁸ Brysk, *supra* note 16 at 78.

¹⁹ Black, *supra* note 17 at 54.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ David Petrasek, "Not dead yet: Human rights in an illiberal world order" (2019) 74:1 Intl J 103 at 107.

and rejecting motions supporting Palestinian human rights within the Council itself.²²

Paris describes a briefing note prepared by several experts in 2015 that was integrated into the Liberal Party of Canada's election platform: and the subsequent mandate letters that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau provided to his cabinet included championing "human rights and pluralism, particularly on women, children, refugees and minorities in addition to expanding approaches to helping fragile states including contributing to UN peace operations."²³ He observes that Trudeau has subsequently emerged as one of the world's most vocal defenders of small-l liberal values, including openness and inclusiveness.²⁴ Yet, the current government's approach to human rights in its foreign policy remains vulnerable to the historical criticism that Canada is rarely willing to sacrifice material advantage for human rights.²⁵

III. Voices at Risk in Context

An early version of *Voices at Risk* was published and circulated to Canadian missions abroad for International Human Rights Day on December 10, 2016.²⁶ These guidelines were the first of their kind in Canada, directing Canadian missions abroad to provide support to HRDs by offering them awards, monitoring their activities, visiting them in prison and attending their trials.²⁷

Their release responds to UN Human Rights Fact Sheet 29, which promotes the integration of the protection of HRDs into ministries of foreign affairs and notes the possibility of creating guidelines for members of the foreign service.²⁸ The guidelines were released well after those of the European Union and states including Ireland, Norway, Switzerland and

²² Joanna Harrington, "Canada and the United Nations Human Rights Council: Dissent and Division" (2009) 60:1 UNBLJ 78.

²³ Roland Paris, "The Promise and Perils of Justin Trudeau's Foreign Policy" (2018) in Norman Hillmer & Philippe Lagassé, eds, *Justin Trudeau and Canadian Foreign Policy* (Ottawa: Canada and International Affairs, 2018) 17 at 20.

²⁴ *Ibid* at 17.

²⁵ Lui, *supra* note 12 at 165.

²⁶ Global Affairs Canada, *Memorandum of Information* (Ottawa: Global Affairs Canada, 2016) at 3 [*Memorandum of Information*].

²⁷ *Ibid*.

²⁸ United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights. "Human Rights Defenders: Protecting the Right to Defend Human Rights Fact Sheet no.29," (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights: no date) at 31.

Finland which all released their guidelines between 2010 and 2014. While there is no information indicating why the guidelines were published in 2016, a Memorandum of Information circulated by GAC at the time suggests that the policy would indirectly support Canada's bid for a seat on the Security Council,²⁹ although Canada did not ultimately win the seat.

Their publication should also be understood within the newly elected Trudeau government's repeated and renewed public commitments to upholding international liberalism and rules-based international order.³⁰ *Voices at Risk* is part of a large and growing package of new policies and procedures which support these claims, including the Feminist International Assistance Policy and the establishment of the Canadian Ombudsperson on Resource Extraction, tasked with monitoring the activities of Canadian corporations operating internationally in the extractive sector.³¹ GAC documents indicate that the guidelines were developed in consultation with specialized Canadian human rights CSOs, the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders, international CSOs and Departmental experts.³² In 2019, the guidelines were updated to better align with the Feminist International Assistance Policy and to provide guidance on specific groups, including LGBTQI2S+ activists, Indigenous peoples, journalists and other identified groups.³³

An issue paper published by GAC in 2021 indicates that the department promotes three key values in supporting HRDs: the inalienability of human rights, do no harm (confidentiality) and consent.³⁴ The guidelines indicate that "respect for human rights is at the heart of Canada's international policies and engagement. Canada works multilaterally, bilaterally and through international trade, development and consular assistance, to strengthen the rules-based international order that protects universal human rights, democracy and respect for the rule of law."³⁵ HRDs are defined as "people who, individually or with others, act to promote or protect human rights through peaceful means, such as by documenting and

²⁹ *Memorandum of Information*, *supra* note 26.

³⁰ Heather Smith & Tari Ajadi, "Canada's feminist foreign policy and human security compared" (2020) 75:3 Intl J 367 at 380.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Memorandum*, *supra* note 26 at 2.

³³ *Voices at Risk* (2019), *supra* note 6 at 2-3.

³⁴ Global Affairs Canada, "Human Rights Defenders," (Ottawa: Global Affairs Canada, 2021) at 2 (accessed through Access to Information and Privacy Request to Global Affairs Canada, April 2021).

³⁵ *Ibid* at 1.

calling attention to violations or abuses by governments, businesses, individuals or groups.”³⁶ The 2021 issue paper indicates that the guidelines apply to peacebuilders as “they are civil society activists and community leaders, working to prevent and resolve conflict, build peace and defend human rights in conflict settings, including in informal peace negotiations and the implementation of peace agreements.”³⁷

The 2021 issue paper then goes on to outline Canada’s approach to protecting HRDs as including re-engagement with multilateral institutions, engagement through bilateral diplomacy, leveraging partnerships with key stakeholders and promoting responsible business conduct.³⁸ The document also provides extensive guidelines related to how HRDs might be supported through Canadian diplomatic missions, such as monitoring and building connections with defenders, publicly raising their profiles, observing legal processes for the detained and providing emergency and other financial assistance to HRDs.³⁹ These guidelines, however, do not create new funding to support HRDs but instead provide an overview of existing Canadian funding for HRDs and refers to the Canadian Fund for Local Initiatives.⁴⁰ *Voices at Risk* also provides best practices when working for specific groups, including women HRDs, journalists, persons with disabilities and Indigenous peoples.⁴¹

Documents retrieved through the ATIP request submitted to GAC Headquarters included a departmental *Voices at Risk* Action Plan for 2020 that lists activities such as: translating guidelines to French, Spanish and Arabic; offering training to Missions, staff and trade commissioner service; building a network of CSOs, supporting HRDs in multilateral forums; updating policy on temporary asylum and visas for HRDs with IRCC; and conducting a survey of mission network to develop a HRD toolkit for missions.⁴² GAC departmental documents frame CSOs as key implementing partners of the guidelines. This is also reflected in their funding distribution.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid* at 3.

³⁸ *Ibid* at 7.

³⁹ Note that this policy does not create any new funding to support HRDs but instead provides an overview of existing Canadian funding for HRDs and refers to the Canadian Fund for Local Initiatives; *Voices at Risk* (2019), *supra* note 6 at 23.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Global Affairs Canada, *Voices at Risk Action Plan* (Ottawa: Global Affairs Canada, 2020) at 8–12 [2021 Action Plan] (accessed through Access to Information and Privacy Request to Global Affairs Canada, April 2021).

While documents indicate that there is no new funding for the implementation of the policy in 2019, GAC provided \$1.75 million and \$800,000 to two international CSOs that directly engage in the protection of HRDs at risk.⁴³ Additionally, a 2021 briefing document indicates that in that same year, the Office of Human Rights, Freedom and Inclusion provided \$7.5 million in annual funding to implementing partners.⁴⁴

IV. CSOs, Human Rights and Canadian Foreign Policy

Clément notes that historically, the integration of human rights into Canadian foreign policy was the result of a fascinating dynamic between domestic and international initiatives: “[s]ocial movement organizations and law reformers drew on the UDHR to campaign for domestic reform, which resulted in the creation of an expansive human rights system. These developments fostered a sympathetic atmosphere for expanding Canada’s international human rights obligations.”⁴⁵ Indeed, there are many examples of CSOs making documented contributions to Canadian foreign policy on human rights, including efforts taken by Amnesty International Canada to ensure that Canada would not deport people convicted of capital offences to face the death penalty through advocacy directed at the Supreme Court of Canada.⁴⁶ Smith and Ajadi identify civil society as one of five sources which have contributed to the evolution of Canadian discourse on human security and feminist foreign policy.⁴⁷

However, there is a tendency within the broader foreign policy literature to disregard the contributions of civil society to Canadian foreign policy, instead focusing primarily on the actions of the state. Macdonald describes how state-civil society relations evolved from one of consultation, beginning with the government of Pierre Elliot Trudeau, to one of contestation under Mulroney and Chrétien. This evolution was stifled by the Harper government in the 2010s which cut funding to some Canadian CSOs “for expressing public criticism of Canadian foreign policy.”⁴⁸ They also

⁴³ *Voices at Risk* (2019), *supra* note 6 at 3.

⁴⁴ *2021 Action Plan*, *supra* note 42 at 3.

⁴⁵ Clément, *supra* note 8 at 775.

⁴⁶ Andrew Thompson, *In Defence of Principles: NGOs and Human Rights in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010) at 89–116.

⁴⁷ Smith & Ajadi, *supra* note 30 at 373.

⁴⁸ Laura Macdonald, “Canada goes global: building transnational relations between Canada and the world, 1968–2017” (2018) 24:3 CFPJ 358 at 367.

attempted to limit CSO advocacy through restrictions introduced by the Canada Revenue Agency that would eliminate the ability of organizations to issue charitable tax receipts if those restrictions were violated.⁴⁹ These changes led to a silencing of international human rights advocacy among Canadian CSOs during that period for fear of loss of funding. State-civil society relations tentatively returned to consultation and contestation under the government of Justin Trudeau, as he “came to power with a strong message that his government would reopen the doors of decision-making to public input. The mandate letters he issued to his cabinet ministers, including his trade and foreign ministers, contained powerful directions to promote public consultation.”⁵⁰

Canadian CSOs engage in human rights through a combination of service delivery and advocacy in both local and global contexts. Individual charities and the broader public benefit from advocacy on international human rights through better public policy and a more engaged public sphere. Gibbons, Cameron and Kwiecien suggest that “the wealth of practical experience and close connections with groups that lack a voice in policy debates enables many charities to bring ideas and evidence that would otherwise not enter the policy-making process.”⁵¹ This is particularly true for Canadian CSOs focused on promoting human rights through long-term partnerships with CSOs in the Global South who have extensive knowledge of the human rights situation and the lived experiences of their colleagues. It also reinforces the importance of strong state-civil society relations in the context of Canadian foreign policy on human rights.

V. CSO Engagement in Voices at Risk Through GAC Headquarters

Two aspects of the policy documents included in the ATIP of GAC Headquarters demonstrate that Canadian CSOs were consulted in the development of *Voices at Risk* and engaged in its implementation. Some of the files included in the document package pertained to two separate civil society consultations on the drafting of the revised guidelines, which had

⁴⁹ Voices-Voix Coalition, “*Dismantling Democracy: Stifling Debate and Dissent in Canada*” (Ottawa: Voices-Voix Coalition, 2015) at 37 [Voices-Voix Coalition] (accessed through Access to Information and Privacy Request to Global Affairs Canada, April 2021).

⁵⁰ Macdonald, *supra* note 48 at 368.

⁵¹ John D Cameron & Olivia Kwiecien, “Advocacy, charity and struggles for global justice in Canada” (2019) 40:3 Can J Dev Stud 330 at 335.

taken place in 2018 and 2019. In addition to an overview of their concerns, there is also a chart indicating how their feedback was incorporated into the revised guidelines.

A significant portion of the material included in the ATIP package from GAC Headquarters concerns consultation with Canadian CSOs to support the development of the revised *Voices at Risk* Guidelines released in 2019. This includes a discussion paper which invites respondents to reflect on their experiences with HRDs and with implementing the guidelines which were due in October of 2018.⁵² It also includes a summary of feedback from CSOs, which appears to be in response to a second request for feedback due on March 15, 2019.⁵³ Additionally, there is a chart produced by GAC that indicates where that feedback was integrated into the revised guidelines, which includes elements of the 2018 consultation that had not previously been addressed. For example, one of the CSO concerns raised in relation to the draft of *Voices at Risk* in 2019, was the inclusion of consent as a guiding principle for Canadian missions to take action on behalf of an HRD. The document points to the inclusion of “[c]onsent- actions taken with the free, full and informed consent of the human rights defender in question...” as one of three key values listed on page three of the guidelines.⁵⁴

Although the chart demonstrates that the input from CSOs was reviewed, it was not always adopted. For example, the chart notes that CSOs asked that the guidelines “state that missions will call on Canadian corporations to respect all human rights standards.”⁵⁵ The corresponding addition to the guidelines states that “[w]hen conflicts arise around the use of land and natural resources, especially when Canadian companies are involved, missions can advocate for meaningful engagement and partnerships with Indigenous peoples on issues of concern.”⁵⁶ Indeed, this, and other language concerning Canadian corporations, fall short of stating that “Canadian corporations should respect all human rights standards” by

⁵² Global Affairs Canada, *Discussion Paper: Updating Voices at Risk: Canada's Guidelines on Supporting Human Rights Defenders* (Ottawa: Global Affairs Canada, 2018) (accessed through Access to Information and Privacy Request to Global Affairs Canada, April 2021).

⁵³ Global Affairs Canada, *Voices at Risk Canada's Guidelines on Supporting Human Rights Defenders: Summary of some of the feedback from Civil Society Organizations* (Ottawa: Global Affairs Canada, 2019) (accessed through Access to Information and Privacy Request to Global Affairs Canada, April 2021).

⁵⁴ Global Affairs Canada, *Summary of the CSO Feedback* (Ottawa: Global Affairs Canada, 2019) at 3 (accessed through Access to Information and Privacy Request to Global Affairs Canada, April 2021).

⁵⁵ *Ibid* at 11.

⁵⁶ *Ibid* at 11–12.

encouraging voluntary engagement instead of implementing a legal standard. Given the prevalence of advocacy related to human rights violations and environmental disaster around mining sites owned by Canadian companies, such lax language should be of concern. Moreover, it demonstrates the limits of the extent to which GAC was willing to respond to CSO feedback.

In addition to the consultation document, many of the documents provided by GAC Headquarters describe Canadian CSOs as key implementing partners of *Voices at Risk*. First, a December 2019 briefing note lists “leveraging partnerships with other countries, civil society, Indigenous Peoples and the private sector including Canadian business interests abroad” as one of the ways that Canada’s support for HRDs takes many forms and adapts to changing needs.⁵⁷ The talking points in the same document include a reference to the guidelines drawing on and reflecting the advice of Canadian CSOs as well as Canadian diplomats.⁵⁸

A document entitled “GAC Human Rights Defender Strategy” from October 2017 lists financial support for several Canadian CSOs to organize human rights events and deploy programs supporting HRDs as being among their strategic accomplishments.⁵⁹ In a document titled “Action Plan: *Voices at Risk*” dated July 2020, CSOs are included as implementing partners in various key activities, including establishing a CSO consultation group to identify case examples and success stories,⁶⁰ regular engagement,⁶¹ and pledges financial support to organizations working on the Women, Peace and Security Agenda and those that support emergency assistance needs.⁶² Project Lifeline, an Irish NGO, is also cited in GAC PowerPoint slides that provide information about violence against HRDs globally.⁶³

The ATIP request results and publicly available data suggest that CSOs also confronted challenges in their engagement with GAC Headquarters in their consultations in 2018 and 2019. The document “Summary of some of

⁵⁷ *Voices at Risk*, *supra* note 6 at 2.

⁵⁸ *Ibid* at 5.

⁵⁹ Global Affairs Canada, *GAC Human Rights Defender Strategy* (Ottawa: Global Affairs Canada, 2017).

⁶⁰ 2021 *Action Plan*, *supra* note 34 at 2 (accessed through Access to Information and Privacy Request to Global Affairs Canada, April 2021).

⁶¹ *Ibid* at 3.

⁶² *Ibid* at 4.

⁶³ Global Affairs Canada, *Voices at Risk: Canada’s Guidelines on Supporting Human Rights Defenders Slide Show* (Ottawa: Global Affairs Canada, 2020) at 6–7 (accessed through Access to Information and Privacy Request to Global Affairs Canada, April 2021).

the feedback from CSOs, March 15, 2019” opens with an admonishment to the Government of Canada for failing to provide opportunities for CSOs to meet directly with officials which “hindered the ability of CSOs to meaningfully engage in the process.”⁶⁴ Moreover, it indicates that CSOs were given only one week to respond to the second request for consultations sent on the revised guidelines on March 8, 2019 with a deadline on March 15, 2019. This deadline was during March break in Ontario, where many internationally-oriented CSOs are located, and thus did not provide adequate time to respond.⁶⁵ Anecdotally, these kinds of requests for consultation with quick turnarounds are common in interactions between GAC and Canadian CSOs but have not been formally documented elsewhere.

When the updated version of the guidelines were released in 2019, Amnesty International Canada and other Canadian CSOs responded by issuing a release welcoming the update but implored the government to compliment them with an implementation plan and new funding.⁶⁶ Although an implementation plan was included in the results from the ATIP request of GAC Headquarters, the document does not appear to be publicly available.

Overall, these findings suggest that engagement of CSOs by GAC Headquarters concerning the guidelines has been limited. In documents, CSOs are identified as key implementing partners, yet they were only invited to submit comments on drafts of *Voices at Risk* and not consulted in person. Additionally, information that could be useful in helping CSOs to advocate for stronger implementation of the project, through the Implementation Plan, is not readily accessible on the GAC website.

The results of this section are partial and represent the interactions that were documented by GAC staff. The case study below demonstrates the significant engagement of CSOs in the implementation of the guidelines at one single embassy which suggests that there was already much broader engagement by CSOs at the national level before the guidelines were released. Further research could be undertaken with CSOs to document how

⁶⁴ Voices-Voix Coalition, *supra* note 49 at 1.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Amnesty International Canada, “Joint Press Release, Canada’s new guidelines to support human rights defenders a step in the right direction” (17 June 2019), online: <amnesty.ca> [perma.cc/CC8W-T6T3].

they engaged with the drafting of the guidelines in an effort to measure their impact on their publication and contents.

VI. Advocating for the Implementation of Voices at Risk at the Embassy of Canada to the Philippines

The Embassy of Canada to the Philippines is an interesting case to examine in relation to the implementation of *Voices at Risk* because of the significant risks faced by HRDs in the Philippines, strong existing links in advocacy communities between the Philippines and Canada and the strategic importance of bilateral relationships between Canada and the Philippines. HRDs in the Philippines have faced violence and death at the hands of their own government, including high profile cases like the arbitrary arrest of Senator Trillanes, an opposition critic and former head of the Republic of the Philippines Commission on Human Rights,⁶⁷ and false charges against Nobel Peace Prize Winner Maria Ressa related to tax evasion that were recently overturned in court.⁶⁸ Under the current and previous governments, the names of HRDs have been included on lists of sympathizers of the New People's Army, exposing them to the risk of arbitrary arrest and extra-judicial killings in a process known as "red-tagging."⁶⁹ In one instance, this has led to reprisals against the Secretary General of Karapatan Alliance of People's Rights, which was declared a communist and terrorist organization through multiple government channels, for consulting with the UN Human Rights Council.⁷⁰ While the government claims that it has created a safe civic space for civil society,⁷¹ it has also failed to create an enabling legislative environment to support this claim. Opposition party members in the Philippines are currently making a third attempt to pass a "Protection of Human Rights Defenders Act" that would protect HRDs from the rights violations described above.⁷² The

⁶⁷ Human Rights Defenders, "Philippines: Arbitrary arrest of Senator Antonio Trillanes" (10 May 2018), online: <fidh.org> [perma.cc/YWA9-2BE6].

⁶⁸ Karishma Vaswani, "Maria Ressa: Truth and justice won today, says Nobel laureate", *BBC News* (18 January 2023), online: <bbc.com> [perma.cc/K67F-JJYM].

⁶⁹ UN News, "Philippines: UN rights office appalled over simultaneous killings of 'red-tagged' activists", *UN News* (9 March 2021), online: <news.un.org> [perma.cc/3KY7-99Y3].

⁷⁰ Secretary-General, *Cooperation with the United Nations, its representatives and mechanisms in the field of human rights: Advanced Edited Version*, UN HRC, 51st sess, No 2 and 5, A/HRC/51/47 (2022) at 62.

⁷¹ *Ibid* at 63.

⁷² Christina Chi, "Bill Protecting Human Rights Defenders Hurdles House Panel", *Philstar Global* (28 February 2023), online: <philstar.com> [perma.cc/5VYB-NQDE].

current situation suggests that the government of the Philippines is currently failing to meet its international obligations under the *Declaration on the Rights of Human Rights Defenders* and the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* which require the creation of an enabling environment for the work of HRDs.⁷³

The killings and arrests described above are connected to Canada and *Voices at Risk* in several ways. First, many HRDs in the Philippines work in partnership with networks of Canadian CSOs. Two such networks include the International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines – Canada, which is made up of provincial and municipal chapters along with board members from many human rights-oriented faith-based organizations, and the Philippines sub-group of the Asia Pacific Working Group of Cooperation Canada, which includes membership from Canadian CSOs, unions and academic institutions. I have played a coordinating role in both of these networks. These networks and their members have been deeply involved in raising awareness about the violence facing HRDs in the Philippines by writing open-letters to the Canadian Embassy to the Philippines and to the government of the Philippines, writing blogs, hosting events featuring HRDs from the Philippines and hosting regular meetings at which they receive situation updates.⁷⁴ Many of these advocacy efforts invoke *Voices at Risk* to justify calls for the support of HRDs. Concurrently, the Philippines is also an important bilateral trade partner to Canada. The Philippines is part of a broader trade agreement which Canada is currently negotiating with the ASEAN, and when Rodolfo Robles became Ambassador of the Philippines to Canada in November 2020, he expressed interest in the negotiation of a new bilateral trade agreement between the two countries.⁷⁵

The ATIP results show the important role that Canadian CSOs have played in engaging the Canadian mission on *Voices at Risk*. Among eighteen pieces of correspondence, including seventeen e-mails and one letter that were included in the results, eight directly responded to correspondence from Canadian CSOs that were either raising specific human rights concerns or requests for meetings related to supporting HRDs. In most cases, embassy

⁷³ Lawlor, *supra* note 4 at 6.

⁷⁴ KAIROS Canada, "Open Letter to the Government of Canada re: Philippines Government Crackdown on HR defenders" (November 2019), online (pdf): <kairoscanada.org> [perma.cc/QJ23-J2JE].

⁷⁵ Neil Moss, "Canada-Philippines ties positive despite past flare-ups, says new Filipino envoy", *The Hill Times* (3 February 2021), online: <hilltimes.com> [perma.cc/RDM5-B5EJ].

staff prepared briefing materials in advance of a meeting or drafted official correspondence responding to requests, demonstrating that such requests encourage engagement by embassy staff, particularly the human rights officer, on the protection of HRDs in relation to the guidelines. However, many of the written responses were based on form responses prepared at the embassy.

Moreover, in one instance, correspondence shows that a report about the human rights situation at a mine in the provinces of Nueva Vizcaya and Quirino both invited a response from the embassy and was later considered in the response to a request by the mine holder for a meeting with another Canadian embassy. In an e-mail sent to a GAC employee on December 20, 2018, the CSO outlines how the names of twenty-seven individuals and two organizations who opposed the mining operation had been red-tagged on posters and pamphlets circulated in their communities, noting that such actions are a common precursor to extra-judicial killings.⁷⁶ After a significant exchange of correspondence, the Human Rights Officer essentially rebuffs most of the organization's requests by indicating that other bodies, including the UN Council on Human Rights and the Canadian Ombudsperson for Resource Extraction, would be better situated to review these claims. However, the response does indicate an intention to conduct a field visit to the mine to better understand the environmental, humanitarian, political and security situation, noting that this would be a logistically challenging trip.⁷⁷

This e-mail correspondence demonstrates early challenges. First, an e-mail from a senior desk officer for the region from GAC sent on December 19, 2018, indicates that they had not previously dealt with the guidelines and asks for more information from the embassy which was forwarded three days later.⁷⁸ This correspondence took place more than two years after the first version of *Voices at Risk* was released. Moreover, the correspondence makes no reference to section 4.2 of the 2016 version pertaining to cases involving Canadian entities. The section suggests that reported rights

⁷⁶ Email correspondence between Embassy of Canada to the Philippines and Global Affairs Canada, (20 December 2018) (accessed through Access to Information Request to the Embassy of Canada to the Philippines, March 2021).

⁷⁷ Email correspondence from the Canadian Embassy to the Philippines (23 January 2019) (accessed through Access to Information Request to the Embassy of Canada to the Philippines, March 2021).

⁷⁸ Email correspondence between Embassy of Canada to the Philippines and Global Affairs Canada (19 December 2018) (accessed through Access to Information Request to the Embassy of Canada to the Philippines, March 2021).

violations might impact “the supports that the mission to the Canadian company in question, including denying or withdrawing trade advocacy support.”⁷⁹

Subsequent correspondence included in the same ATIP request shows that the Canadian mining company requested a meeting with the Head of Mission at the Permanent Mission of Canada to the United Nations ahead of a meeting with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in relation to the above allegations about their mine in the Philippines on June 12, 2019.⁸⁰ In the same set of correspondence, the Canadian Permanent Mission to the UN consults with the Canadian Embassy in the Philippines as to whether they should agree to meet with the mining company. An email from the senior desk officer from June 18, 2019, indicates that GAC Headquarters agreed that the meeting should be held but that it should support responsible business practices.⁸¹ An email from the Trade Directorate at the embassy on June 19 also indicates that the mission is supportive of the meeting with the mining company and that they are “an important stakeholder in the Philippines’ adoption and implementation of the Mining Association of Canada’s corporate social responsibility standard *Towards Sustainable Mining*.”⁸² A follow-up email sent on June 25, 2019, reiterated the trade commissioner’s support for the meeting noting that the embassy “had recommended that and is arranging for PRE to visit the mine and meet with stakeholder group who both oppose and support the operation.”⁸³ By this time, the revised version of the guidelines had been published. The response detailed above does follow through on guidance in both versions for Missions to consult with each other and GAC entities related to concerns about the activity of Canadian entities abroad in relation to human rights. However, it also demonstrates that the embassy did not

⁷⁹ Global Affairs Canada, “*Voices at Risk: Canada’s Guidelines on Supporting Human Rights Defenders*” (Ottawa: Global Affairs Canada, 2016) at 12.

⁸⁰ Correspondence with the Permanent Mission of Canada to the United Nations to the Embassy of the Philippines. (12 June 2019) (accessed through Access to Information Request to the Embassy of Canada to the Philippines, March 2021).

⁸¹ Correspondence between Desk Officers at the Canadian Embassy to the Philippines (18 June 2019) (accessed through Access to Information Request to the Embassy of Canada to the Philippines, March 2021).

⁸² Correspondence from the Trade Directorate at the Canadian Embassy to the Philippines (19 June 2019). Access to Information Request to the Embassy of Canada to the Philippines: March 2021.

⁸³ Email correspondence between Embassy of Canada to the Philippines and Global Affairs Canada (20 December 2018) (accessed through Access to Information Request to the Embassy of Canada to the Philippines, March 2021).

use the mechanisms prescribed for resolving such concerns, including referring the dispute to the Canadian Ombudsperson on Resource Extraction or the Canadian National Contact Point for the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, available in the later version.⁸⁴

This seems to relate to a broader gap in capacity related to *Voices at Risk*. There are multiple email exchanges between staff asking for or providing details on the guidelines, including one that was sent to the Head of Mission on December 16, 2020, four years after the original version was released.⁸⁵ Additional e-mail correspondence from June 14, 2021, indicates that the human rights officers at the embassy were attending training in that month, and this is the first and only reference to training on the guidelines in the documents provided by the embassy.

The capacity gap is coupled with cynicism expressed by the human rights staff at the embassy in e-mail correspondence. On May 14, 2018, in response to an inquiry about Canada's response to the 600-person "terrorist" list released by the Philippines government, which included Indigenous, environmental and human rights defenders, one human rights officer responded that "[a]n important distinction to note from our perspective: 'Voices at risk' provides guidelines for *supporting* HRDs. It leaves *protecting* HRDs to UNHCR and CSOs."⁸⁶ This is concerning given the lack of financial and technical resources available to most CSOs to secure their own protection, let alone those of HRDs from outside their organizations. This response also seems to ignore the recommended actions provided to embassy staff to support HRDs, including options to offer them asylum in Canada. Both of these shortcomings connect directly to concerns raised in the civil society consultation notes provided in the GAC Headquarters ATIP from March 15, 2019.⁸⁷ In addition to this comment, a more revealing e-mail was sent from a different political and public affairs staff person on July 15, 2019, with the subject line "Isn't this the whole Voices at Risk in a nutshell?" The entirety of the e-mail then goes on to quote a news article that starts by saying "[a]n international conference designed to promote media freedom

⁸⁴ Global Affairs Canada, *supra* note 34 at 22.

⁸⁵ Email correspondence between staff and head of mission at the Embassy of Canada to the Philippines (16 December 2020) (accessed through Access to Information Request to the Embassy of Canada to the Philippines, March 2021).

⁸⁶ Email correspondence between staff (14 May 2018) (accessed through Access to Information Request to the Embassy of Canada to the Philippines, March 2021).

⁸⁷ Voices-Voix Coalition, *supra* note 49 at 5.

around the world has ended with an acknowledgement by Canada's (then) Foreign Affairs Minister that there isn't much Western governments can do beyond advocacy."⁸⁸

Overall, these findings demonstrate that Canadian CSOs and advocacy networks play a significant role in contesting the protection of HRDs drawing on *Voices at Risk* with staff at the embassy. It also draws attention to the challenges that embassy staff are facing in relation to the implementation of the guidelines. Further public advocacy on these challenges has the potential to contribute to a push for better resources to support the protection of HRDs.

VII. Conclusion

The results of the analyzed ATIP requests offer important insight into both the implementation of *Voices at Risk* and state-civil society relations. First, the examination of the ATIP request submitted to the Canadian Embassy to the Philippines raises serious questions about its implementation of *Voices at Risk*. It demonstrates that embassy staff initially lacked the knowledge and capacity to fully implement the guidelines. Moreover, through its failure to take concrete measures to address concerns about red-tagging at a mining site operated by a Canadian company, which could have included referring the case to the Canadian Ombudsperson on Resource Extraction, or at least recommending that they not meet with the embassy in Geneva under the existing guidelines. This suggests that Canada remains more invested in its business interests in the Philippines than it is in its commitment to protecting HRDs. Canada also has not publicly denounced the human rights situation in the Philippines, for HRDs or otherwise, despite recent announcements regarding the deepening of its economic ties, including through its Indo-Pacific Partnership,⁸⁹ and the related establishment of a new immigration centre in Manila to fast-track the immigration process.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Email correspondence between embassy staff and Head of Mission (15 July 2019) (accessed through Access to Information Request to the Embassy of Canada to the Philippines, March 2021).

⁸⁹ Office of the Prime Minister of Canada, News Release, "Prime Minister strengthens ties with ASEAN and expands partnerships in the Indo-Pacific" (13 November 2020), online: <pm.gc.ca/en/news/news-releases> [perma.cc/GC75-RNX9].

⁹⁰ Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, News Release, "Canada opens operations centre in the Philippines to boost global immigration processing capacity" (3 March 2023), online: <canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/news/> [perma.cc/Y56B-ULJH].

The Government of Canada and the Canadian Embassy to the Philippines should take more public steps to address the situation of HRDs in the Philippines. This could include calling on the Government of the Philippines to adopt the *Protection of Human Rights Defenders Act* currently being reviewed in the Philippines, and to bring its laws and policies in compliance with international instruments, including *The Marrakech Declaration on Expanding the civic space and promoting and protecting human rights defenders with a specific focus on women: The role of national human rights institutions*, the *San Jose Guidelines: Guidelines against Intimidation or Reprisals*, and *The UN Guidance Note on Protection and Promotion of Civil Space*. Moreover, it could act on the recommendation of Mary Lawlor, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, who recommends that “[f]oreign embassies, in consultation with human rights defenders who receive threats, should publicly denounce the threats.”⁹¹ These changes are especially important given two recent developments in Canada’s Foreign Policy on Human Rights. In January 2023, Canada launched its new “Policy for Civil Society Partnerships for International Assistance – A Feminist Approach” which includes facilitating a safe and enabling environment for civil society as one of its core objectives and includes “understanding and mitigating the distinct barriers and risks faced by civil society entities, including human rights defenders and women’s, 2SLGBTQI+, youth and Indigenous organizations and networks.”⁹² Canada also recently announced that it would seek a nomination to the UN Human Rights Council in 2026. If Canada wishes to be taken seriously, it will need to improve its implementation of efforts to support the protection of HRDs through *Voices at Risk* and beyond.

Second, the findings of this article add to the literature on state-civil society relations in relation to the development and implementation of Canadian foreign policy on human rights. As previously noted, the Liberal government under Justin Trudeau has consistently signaled a commitment to revitalized relationships with Canadian CSOs,⁹³ including through the above-mentioned civil society partnership policy. Yet, the ATIP submitted to GAC Headquarters showed that the department faltered in its implementation of this strategy in its engagement with CSOs on the revised

⁹¹ Lawlor, *supra* note 4 at 21.

⁹² Government of Canada, “Canada’s Policy for Civil Society Partnerships for International Assistance – A Feminist Approach” (6 January 2023), online: <international.gc.ca> [perma.cc/9RZQ-SAGA].

⁹³ Macdonald, *supra* note 48 at 46.

guidelines, demonstrated by its failure to meet with them directly and its tight timelines for CSO written responses. Further, through the letters and reports shared with the Canadian Embassy to the Philippines, Canadian CSOs have shown consistent advocacy for the implementation of *Voices at Risk* and broader international human rights norms related to the protection of HRDs. This offers new insights on a current advocacy priority for Canadian CSOs not documented elsewhere in the literature. Moreover, the reluctance or inability of Embassy staff to directly address the concerns raised by CSOs about HRDs in the Philippines challenges the notion of strong state-civil society relations. GAC officials both at headquarters and embassies need to take more care to create an enabling environment which addresses the needs of Canadian CSOs to fully participate in government-led processes to foster better state-civil society relations. Given the close relationships between staff working at Canadian CSOs and the HRDs with whom they work in partnership in the Philippines and elsewhere, the meaningful implementation of the guidelines could also help to bolster their trust in the Canadian government. This could be furthered through improved transparency on the implementation of *Voices at Risk* through publicly available government reporting on the guidelines.

In addition to contributing to the academic literature, it is my hope that the contents of this article will be useful to Canadian CSOs in their advocacy for the implementation of *Voices at Risk*. While not comprehensive, it does demonstrate some of the challenges facing GAC staff at headquarters and embassies in its development and implementation, including that the policy has continued to evolve since its most recent version was published in 2019 and initial operational challenges at the Canadian Embassy to the Philippines. It also demonstrates the intentions of staff at GAC Headquarters to take feedback from Canadian CSOs seriously through the chart they produced that maps how their contributions were integrated into the guidelines. Finally, it suggests that Canadian CSOs should continue to press staff at embassies and headquarters in relation to the protection of HRDs in two ways. First, there is a clear gap in the implementation of business and human rights standards through the guidelines and this should continue to be raised in letters and meetings. Second, Canadian CSOs should urge embassies to draw on emerging international mechanisms for the protection of HRDs by publicly denouncing killings, reprisals and arbitrary arrests of and against HRDs in the Philippines and elsewhere.

Finally, this article has identified a significant need for further research on *Voices at Risk* and civil society's engagement with it. In relation to the guidelines, interviews should be undertaken with staff at GAC Headquarters and Canadian embassies to understand how and why the guidelines were developed the way they were, and what progress and gaps remain in their implementation. In addition, research could be undertaken with Canadian CSOs to document how they contributed to the development of the guidelines and what impact their contributions had on their most recent version. This research could also reflect on the experiences of staff at the organizations that work with the government to provide more detail on state-civil society relations in this context.