



Chapter Three  
**Key opposition  
strategies and  
tactics**

This is one chapter of  
**Rights at Risk: Observatory on the Universality of Rights Trends Report 2017**  
To access the full publication, please visit [www.oursplatform.org](http://www.oursplatform.org)

## Background

Influence and impact are not won by rhetoric alone. Anti-rights actors are making inroads into our human rights standards not only because of their increased numbers and networks, or their imaginative and sustained re-conceptions of what human rights norms should and do mean. The success of any movement is also integrally driven by its organizing tactics.

Like their shifts and feints in discursive strategy, the religious right active in international human rights policy spaces has not remained static in their organizing

Like their shifts and feints in discursive strategy, the religious right active in international human rights policy spaces has not remained static in their organizing. This landscape reflects several overarching trends: learning from their opposition, namely feminists and other progressives and their strategies at United Nations conferences in the 1990s; mirroring successful tactics developed in partnership with powerful elites from the domestic level to the international; and moving from a paradigm of symbolic protest to 'insiders', with the attendant changes in opportunity mapping and approach.

In early engagement at the international policy level, anti-rights actors were often explicit in their blocking strategies, carrying out symbolic protests and tactics of intimidation. To some extent ultra-conservative actors continue this approach through procedural tactics, and at the CSW. Recent examples include: chasing some feminists down the hall and angrily questioning why they didn't participate in a standing ovation for anti-abortion activists; battles of fliers; anti-rights actors' attempts to infiltrate side-bar negotiation discussions; and parallel

and side events turning hostile and accusatory during the question and answer period. Overall, however, the larger picture has shifted.

Religious right actors are no longer merely on the defensive or reactive; they are strategic and proactive. They do not only attempt to tinker at the edges of agreements and block certain language, but to transform the framework conceptually and develop alternative and parallel tracks of influence, standards, and norm production. This reflects a higher level of engagement and long-term investment in the UN as an institution, and the building of organizing strategies to further this change.

They do not only attempt to tinker at the edges of agreements and block certain language, but to transform the framework conceptually and develop alternative and parallel tracks of influence, standards, and norm production

Today, the global right working in international human rights policy spaces employs a number of tactics to bring their movement together; build networks and interlinkages; access existing forms of social and economic power; leverage links to religious institutional missions and figures active on the domestic level worldwide; cultivate relationships and direct connections with blocs of delegates; organize with an eye to the future; create and disseminate alternative forms of knowledge; and creatively boost their messaging.

Anti-rights actors at the UN, despite their conservatism and rigidity in matters of doctrine and worldview, have demonstrated an openness to building new kinds of strategic alliances, organizing techniques, and forms of

rhetoric. As a result, their power in this space has increased. We shall examine this spectrum of involvement in greater detail below.

## 1. Civil society training of UN delegates

### GLOBAL FAMILY POLICY FORUM

For years, conservative actors at the UN have worked to initiate and build on their relationships with State delegates through regular training opportunities. The former World Family Policy Center Forum, which is based at the Mormon Brigham Young University (BYU) Law School in Utah, United States, was established in 1999. This yearly training meeting for “concerned United Nations diplomats, opinion leaders, and scholars” focused on the ‘pro-family’ movement, i.e. “on international family policy issues.”<sup>388</sup> The three-day conference on “emerging trends” on the ‘natural family’, human rights, marriage, gender, children’s rights, and national sovereignty took place each July in the United States. It is estimated that between seventy and a hundred of the UN diplomatic corps, largely from Catholic, Christian Evangelical-majority, and Muslim-majority countries, attended these meetings each year.<sup>389</sup> Financial assistance was available for participants.

For years, conservative actors at the UN have worked to initiate and build on their relationships with State delegates through regular training opportunities

Speakers at these meetings included senior advisers to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the former prime minister of Finland, and the ambassador of Qatar, who was then the head of the G-77 bloc at the General Assembly. As mentioned above, this training session facilitated connection with Qatar and the bloc, leading to collaboration towards the anniversary of the Year of the Family, and follow-up steps at the UN over the years.

Family Watch International claimed that “for many of these diplomats, this was their first exposure to the scientific and clinical evidence that proves homosexuality is not genetically determined and fixed”

The Forum run out of BYU has since closed, but a similar yearly training program continues until today, building on a number of similar initiatives that focus on the local level.<sup>390</sup> Family Watch International stepped into the gap in January 2011 with their first hosting of the Global Family Policy Forum near Phoenix, Arizona.<sup>391</sup> This first two-day all expenses paid retreat to learn about “how to advance language and human rights protections for the traditional family at the UN” and how to “resist UN initiatives on sexuality” allegedly hosted 26 State officials from 23 countries.<sup>392</sup> The conference was co-hosted with the Foundation for African Cultural Heritage, an organization with strong links to the World Congress of Families—its head, Theresa Okafar, won WCF ‘Woman of the Year’ in 2015 and is the group’s African representative—and significant engagement as a Christian Right organization active at the CSW. In addition to the financial incentives to attend, the yearly conference is billed as a friendly family affair, with the option of homestays with ‘genuine’ U.S. families.<sup>393</sup>

Family Watch International claimed that “for many of these diplomats, this was their first exposure to the scientific and clinical evidence that proves homosexuality is not genetically determined and fixed” and that this information will “pay huge dividends as UN delegates confront the anti-family” activists on the international level. The 2013 training meeting hosted over 120 delegates, conservative CSO members, and research ‘experts’.<sup>394</sup>

### Delegates and other participants also receive training in negotiating techniques and talking points, and access to a host of training materials

These meetings, held in January of each year, provide an opportunity to preach developing anti-rights discourses, as above, to UN delegates. In 2015, for instance, Gabriele Kuby spoke about her critique of gender ideology at the conference.<sup>395</sup> They aim to share new discourses, ‘scientific’ and statistical information, research, and resources with delegates to inform upcoming debates and negotiations regarding international human rights. They also provide a discrete opportunity in which to share tactics and collectively strategize on ways in which to “ensure that the institution of the family is recognized and respected” in specific UN fora and meetings. Delegates obtain access to a password-protected searchable database of UN documents<sup>396</sup> and are trained to use this database during negotiations to quickly “find prior consensus language on relevant topics.”<sup>397</sup>

Delegates and other participants also receive training in negotiating techniques and talking points, and access to a host of training materials that can be more widely disseminated, such as the detailed UN Resource Guide described above. Not only do these regular trainings foster collaboration and proactive strategizing at the UN,

the systematic and consolidated transmission of specific talking points explains in part why State delegates taking conservative positions in international human rights debates so often do so in contradiction with their own domestic legislation and policies.<sup>398</sup>

### WORLD CONGRESS OF FAMILIES

As detailed above, the World Congress of Families plays a significant role in creating and developing networks amongst anti-rights actors working on human rights at the international level. Its yearly and regional convenings act as de facto training opportunities.

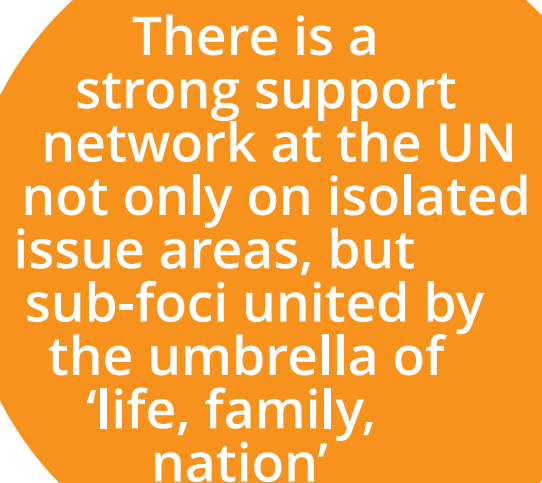
In addition, Family Watch International has begun to host a dedicated pre-World Congress training meeting. Prior to the 2015 WCF in Salt Lake City, for instance, FWI hosted a Leadership Summit for approximately 130 participants.<sup>399</sup> The organizers used the opportunity to disseminate an updated version of the UN Resource Guide and other training materials on negotiating tactics, ‘scientific’ data and talking points, including “Protecting Children from the Sexual Rights Revolution.” Topics covered at the Summit included “Pushing Back Against the Transgender Movement,” “Addressing Sexual Orientation,” and “Fighting Comprehensive Sexuality Education.”<sup>400</sup> Aside from the United States, participants hailed from India, Australia, Mexico, Nigeria, and Morocco.

## 2. International/ cross-regional convenings

Convening, networking, and the development of personal connections and strategic alliances is a powerful strategy, and key to building and sustaining movements. Anti-rights actors continue to build a regional and international web of meetings that help foster closer links between conservative CSOs, States and State blocs, and with powerful intergovernmental bodies and tapping into existing religious institutional networks around the world.

In many cases, the cross-thematic and cross-regional nature of these convenings has promoted anti-rights politics at the United Nations and other human rights spaces. Supplementing religion or region-specific meetings and conferences, there is a drive towards transnational and trans-religious relationship-building around issues of shared interest.

Arguably, the regularity and scale of cross-thematic and transnational connection between conservative advocates have fostered the space to develop a more proactive approach and new strategies. The dynamism of these alliances has allowed them to develop a more holistic, intersecting, cross-issue focus and set of asks at the international policy level. While players at the State level sometimes fade in and out of relative engagement due to changes in domestic politics, there is a strong support network at the UN not only on isolated issue areas, but sub-foci united by the umbrella of 'life, family, nation.' This enables them to take a more coordinated approach to joint initiatives, with a broader base of support amongst advocates: CSO, State, and intergovernmental.



**There is a  
strong support  
network at the UN  
not only on isolated  
issue areas, but  
sub-foci united by  
the umbrella of  
'life, family,  
nation'**

The prime example of this tactic, as organized and led by non-State actors, is the World Congress of Families. We have examined their multiple projects and key actors above. It continues to grow as a powerful networking entity that weaves together a web of regressive leaders working at multiple levels.

Another key player recently emerging with respect to convening power is the Political Network for Values (PNV), which is particularly active at the regional level in the Americas, but has impact on the international policy level as well. The PNV describes itself as a global platform and resource for legislators and political representatives to network among each other on a local and global level “actively defending and promoting the values of life, marriage, family and fundamental freedoms.”<sup>401</sup> The network hosted a Transatlantic Summit as part of its formal launch at the United Nations in 2014, hosted by the Permanent Missions of Hungary, Belarus, the Holy See, and Qatar.<sup>402</sup> The PNV’s initial goals were to push for family as a stand-alone goal in the SDGs<sup>403</sup> and to bring together at the UN policy makers from around the world, whose shared vision is to “preserve and strengthen the family, as well as to promote core moral, social and political values.”<sup>404</sup>

### The Political Network of Values’ unique value is its facilitation of international collaboration between anti-rights CSOs and parliamentary actors

The Political Network of Values’ unique value is its facilitation of international collaboration between anti-rights CSOs and parliamentary actors. It centres and brings in a much greater number of domestic political actors from around the world to link up towards ‘family-friendly’ policies at the local, regional, and international levels in connection with conservative non-State actors.

Alliances not only with State actors working at the UN level, but those domestic parliamentarians who influence foreign (and domestic) policy, are key to wielding real influence at the international policy level. The network and summit create a formalized site for backdoor negotiations to push back rights related to gender and sexuality.

The Transatlantic Summit issued an open letter from parliamentarians from 11 countries around the world. The letter is explicit with respect to two key conservative discourses: strategic recourse into development arenas and areas in order to water down human rights commitments, and opposition to reproductive rights. The letter urged UN leaders not to allow the post-2015 agenda to be “sidetracked by promotion of contentious and divisive issues as ‘rights’”—invalidating human rights *in total* as contentious—and to ask them to object to inclusion of any terminology “that promotes abortion.” This move reflects a broader anti-rights tactic: appealing to diplomats under the rhetoric of “avoiding conflict” or “privileging consensus.”

The Summit also concluded by issuing a Declaration on the Rights of the Family<sup>405</sup>, signed by more than 250 parliamentarians, which was to be submitted to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon<sup>406</sup>. The Declaration claims that marriage is recognized under international law solely as between a man and a woman, and signatories commit to enacting domestic ‘pro-family’ and anti-LGBTQ laws and policies. The network also issued a list of ten commitments—the ‘Decalogue of Commitments for Human Dignity and the Common Good’<sup>407</sup>—for its members, which include opposition to abortion, the defence of religious freedom, conscientious objection, and parental authority over children.

The PNV followed up with a September 2015 Regional Summit of the Americas in Washington, D.C.,<sup>408</sup> which opened with an inter-parliamentary panel on “promoting fundamental values in a globalized political context.” The summit, bringing together more than 70 policy makers

from across Latin America, the Caribbean, Spain, Hungary, Kenya, and the United States, focused on three areas of common concern: human dignity and the “value of life and motherhood;” the “redefinition of marriage and the family as a challenge to fundamental freedoms;” and the protection of freedom of conscientious objection in the context of education.<sup>409</sup>

Key non-State actors involved in the network include the Institute for Family Policy (Spain), the European Christian Political Movement, the Alliance Defending Freedom (U.S.), Red Familia (Mexico), CitizenGo (Spain), the Be Woman project, and Future and Family (Ecuador).<sup>410</sup>

### 3. State reservations

Conservative actors at the United Nations, specifically States and State blocs, have historically sought to undermine international consensus or national accountability under international human rights norms through reservations to human rights agreements, directly threatening the universal applicability of human rights. This practice is particularly common with respect to binding treaties or covenants, as a State reservation from the text is intended to remove the State Party from binding human rights responsibilities under the specified section.

By far, the greatest number of reservations to an international human rights treaty has been to The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).<sup>411</sup> While several States have withdrawn all or part of their reservations since ratification (or accession) of the treaty, a number remain. The majority are to all or parts of article 2, the obligation to review and change discriminatory constitutions, laws, and policies; article 5, the abolition of discriminatory customs and traditions and gender stereotyping; article



By far, the greatest number of reservations to an international human rights treaty has been to The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)



7, on participation in public life; article 9, on the right to nationality; article 15, the right to legal capacity, including choice of domicile; and article 16, equality in the family.

This trend continues, although it is well-established international human rights law that evocations of tradition, culture, or religion cannot justify violations of human rights

States Parties have justified reservations based on a domestic policy to leave issues of personal status or family law to ethnic and religious communities. The largest number of reservations to CEDAW, however, are because of an alleged conflict with religious law or a State Party's constitution, that enshrines religious law, or held subject to religious law. During country reporting to the CEDAW Committee, States Parties then refer to their reservations as justification for the non-compliance of human rights obligations under the treaty.

However, State Party reservations to an international treaty are not automatically valid. The Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties provides that reservations may not be made that are "incompatible with the object and the purpose of the treaty."<sup>412</sup> The bulk of reservations to the CEDAW Convention go to the heart of State accountability for the obligation to eliminate discrimination against women, and are as such incompatible with the object and purpose of the treaty, as the CEDAW Committee repeatedly has affirmed. Yet reference to existing reservations to the CEDAW Convention is continually used by States to dodge their human rights responsibilities to eliminate discrimination.

The State practice of issuing a reservation on UN agreements—and the specific pretext of incompatibility with religious, cultural, or traditional norms—is ongoing, and has spread to non-treaty fora. This trend continues,

although it is well-established international human rights law that evocations of tradition, culture, or religion cannot justify violations of human rights. This is echoed by agreed language in text after text, articulated in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action<sup>413</sup>, and upheld in the binding International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.<sup>414</sup>

'Reservations' to UN documents and agreements that are not formal treaties are also on the rise. States and intergovernmental or religious bodies like the OIC and the Holy See now issue reservations and statements of disassociation with Human Rights Council and General Assembly resolutions. And several Member States issued reservations to the report of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Government Goals<sup>415</sup>, to the final Agenda 2030,<sup>416</sup> and upon the occasion of adoption of the 2030 Agenda at the General Assembly in September 2015.<sup>417</sup>

While many of these have minimal legal effect, the goals of these reservations are political and symbolic

While many of these have minimal legal effect, the goals of these reservations are political and symbolic: to undermine the principle of the universality of rights; to attempt to undermine consensus on human rights standards; to create a freezing effect on the progressive interpretation of human rights language; and to try to mark out a space as a persistent objector to an emerging human rights norm so as not to be held accountable under that norm. Unsurprisingly, many State reservations to the SDGs focused on references to sexual and reproductive rights, sexual orientation, and the definition of the word 'family.'



## 4. Development and promotion of a parallel human rights framework

In a sense, almost all of the trends explored in the section on discourses feed into an overall strategy. Through the i) co-optation and subverting of existing human rights standards and ii) campaigns to develop and obtain consensus on agreed language that is in content deeply anti-rights, regressive actors at the United Nations are first developing and then promoting a parallel human rights framework.

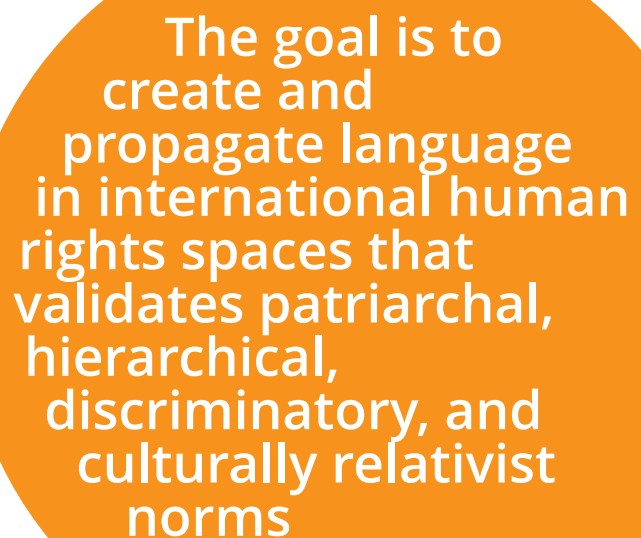
The goal is not only to erode our existing human rights protections and weaken language at UN conferences, but more proactively to create and propagate language in international human rights spaces that validates patriarchal, hierarchical, discriminatory, and culturally relativist norms.

One step towards this end is the drafting of declarative texts that pose as soft human rights or a persuasive encapsulation of existing standards; broad dissemination and sign-ons to these declarations from multiple civil society, State, and institutional actors; and their use as a basis for advocacy and lobbying.

The list of such texts, and the numbers of their signatories, has exploded of late. Key declarations recently formulated, launched, and disseminated include:

### **The Declaration on Rights of Children and their Families, which includes:**

“Each child has the right to a married mother and father...[w]e call upon States Parties and the United Nations system to discourage sexual relations and childbearing outside of the marital bond, and to promote the institution of marriage as the best environment for children.”<sup>418</sup>



The goal is to create and propagate language in international human rights spaces that validates patriarchal, hierarchical, discriminatory, and culturally relativist norms

"Each child has the right to innocence and childhood...[n]oting, with alarm, the increasing international trend to grant autonomous adult rights to children prematurely...and being greatly concerned by the increase of sexual education programs that encourage children and youth to experiment and engage in sexual behavior; [w]e call upon States Parties and the United Nations System to respect the right of parents to guide the sex education of their children."<sup>419</sup>

Any mention of the family in UN resolutions and conference outcomes can only be interpreted in reference to a man and a woman united in marriage

"The protection of children requires the protection of the family...[r]ecognizing that for the full protection of the rights of the child and the family enumerated in this declaration, all governments must fulfill their legal obligation to protect the institution of the family...therefore we call upon all UN Member States and the United Nations system to mainstream a family perspective in all laws, policies and programs, and to ensure the rights of parents are recognized in all governmental actions impacting their children."

#### **The Family Articles, which includes:**

"Relations between individuals of the same sex and other social and legal arrangements that are neither equivalent nor analogous to the family are not entitled to the protections singularly reserved for the family in international law and policy."<sup>420</sup>

"The international community has repeatedly rejected attempts to redefine the family in international law and policy. Any mention of the family in UN resolutions and conference outcomes can only be interpreted in reference to a man and a woman united in marriage, and relations that are equivalent or analogous, including single parent families and multigenerational families."<sup>421</sup>

#### **The World Family Declaration, which includes:**

"The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State." Hence the family exists prior to the State and possesses inherent dignity and rights which States are morally bound to respect and protect... [w]e declare that the family, a universal community based on the marital union of a man and a woman, is the bedrock of society, the strength of our nations, and the hope of humanity."

#### **The Declaration on the Rights of the Family, which includes:**

"We, democratically elected Members of Parliament worldwide, solemnly reaffirm what has long been acknowledged in international law, namely that the family, based on marriage between one man and one woman, is the natural and fundamental unit of society entitled to protection by society and the State."

"Through inter-generational solidarity and the transmission of proven cultural values and practices, as well as religious traditions, [the family] assists its members to...cultivate a greater sense of responsibility towards future generations, while ensuring that the inherent dignity of the human person is respected."

### The Decalogue of Commitments for Human Dignity and the Common Good, which includes:

“The defense of life should begin from its moment of conception, when the human being is most vulnerable and defenseless. The destruction of human embryos, cloning, genetic manipulation and surrogacy are practices that we must reject.”<sup>422</sup>

“Marriage is an institution between a man and a woman in which each one makes a different and simultaneously complementary contribution to the process of family formation. It is therefore vital to promote this institution at the civic level.”<sup>423</sup>

“It is the right of parents to decide the education of their children according to their moral, religious, philosophical and pedagogical convictions, which constitutes a central element to the defense of the dignity of the person. The State cannot and should not replace parents in this task.”<sup>424</sup>

“It is essential to emphasize the value of duties as an element that dignifies people. Relativism is an ideology that is driving our culture to demand more and to create false new rights that abolish duties, especially the duty of caring for the most vulnerable in our society, the elderly, children and unborn human beings.”<sup>425</sup>

“The defense of the right to conscientious objection in every sphere, especially in the field of health care, against the tyranny of relativism constitutes a demand and commitment we must make.”<sup>426</sup>

### The San Jose Articles, which include:

“As a matter of scientific fact a new human life begins at conception<sup>427</sup>...[t]here exists no right to abortion under international law, either by way of treaty obligation or under customary international law. No United Nations treaty can accurately be cited as establishing or recognizing a right to abortion.”<sup>428</sup>

“Assertions by international agencies or non-governmental actors that abortion is a human right are false and should be rejected. There is no international legal obligation to provide access to abortion based on any ground, including but not limited to health, privacy or sexual autonomy, or non-discrimination.”<sup>429</sup>

“Under basic principles of treaty interpretation in international law, consistent with the obligations of good faith and *pacta sunt servanda*, and in the exercise of their responsibility to defend the lives of their people, States may and should invoke treaty provisions guaranteeing the right to life as encompassing a State responsibility to protect the unborn child from abortion.”<sup>430</sup>

•

# Key anti-rights strategies



## 5. Development and citation of alternative 'scientific' sources

As part of the strategic shift towards use of secularized discourses—or those that appear to speak in the language of human rights and international policy—anti-rights actors have made a significant investment in the development of their own 'social science' think tanks. Their articles, reports, and other findings are then widely disseminated and form the basis for advocacy on human rights at the international level.

Anti-rights actors have made a significant investment in the development of their own 'social science' think tanks

A large part of this development and production is led by U.S.-based Christian Right organizations, often in connection with religiously-affiliated academic centres. Policy papers from conservative think tanks are picked up and given oxygen by the growing alternative conservative media, and anti-rights CSOs regularly share updates through their membership and list serves.

This strategy has been described as the intellectualization of the religious right.<sup>431</sup> While the goals, motivation, and preoccupation of conservative actors are linked to their extreme interpretation of religion, culture, and tradition, the language employed in international policy debates reinforces and reproduces these regressive arguments through a proliferation of studies that claim scientific and academic authority.<sup>432</sup> In this way a counter-discourse is produced through a heady mix of traditionalist doctrine and social science.

The Howard Center for Family, Religion and Society,<sup>433</sup> which as noted is affiliated with the World Congress of Families, is one example of an anti-rights actor modeling itself as a think tank. It publishes *The Family in America: A Journal of Public Policy*<sup>434</sup>, which sends out a steady stream of academic articles and featured new research arguing for the social and personal ill-effects of divorce and same-sex partnerships and parenting, the positive effects of the traditional family, complementary gender roles, and so on.

In this way a counter-discourse is produced through a heady mix of traditionalist doctrine and social science

The World Congress of Families and Global Family Policy Forum, among others, expose a wider array of anti-rights actors to pseudo-scientific arguments and advocacy talking points substantiated with reference to such studies and papers. Many policy briefings refer to statements and articles by conservative academics based in Mormon and Catholic colleges, and right wing advocacy groups with mainstream branding like the American College of Pediatricians.

Among other anti-rights actors, Family Watch International also scours the academic and policy literature on divorce, comprehensive sexuality education, sexual orientation, and gender identity for any references to physical or psychological impact. Quotes from sources such as the American Psychological Association, the U.S. Center for Disease Control, the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, and the Gay and Lesbian Medical Association, are then framed misleadingly and repackaged in support of a regressive anti-rights agenda in detailed negotiation guides and briefings to UN delegates and conservative lobbyists.

## 6. Youth mobilization

Participants at the Commission on the Status of Women have noticed a key trend of late. When it comes to anti-rights voices during events at the CSW, the most visible and aggressive today are often young women. This represents one of the most effective strategies employed by the religious right. Tapping into Catholic youth networks around the world, and prioritizing the development of youth leadership and engagement in Christian Right organizations, conservative actors have successfully mobilized a growing number of activists under the age of thirty to push for a regressive agenda at the world stage.

Youth organizations like the International Youth Coalition and the World Youth Alliance go back over a decade, and the current landscape has emerged from a long history of religious right relationship-building and empowerment of young people. Youth recruitment and leadership development—starting with churches, college campuses, and local-level initiatives—are a priority for many conservative actors active in international policy work.<sup>435</sup> This allows for infiltration of youth-specific spaces at the United Nations, a strong counterpoint to progressive youth networks and organizations, and represents a major investment in the future of anti-rights organizing.

Many conservative CSOs run specialized training programs for youth. The U.S.-based anti-rights litigation and advocacy organization Alliance Defending Freedom runs their (Christian) Areté Academy to “engage and equip the next generation of leaders throughout the world” with separate centres in Europe, Latin America, and the United States.<sup>436</sup> The week-long, all expenses paid training “combines biblical worldview training with specialized professional development.”<sup>437</sup> The International Youth Coalition, an initiative of C-Fam mentioned above, runs an internship program and blog for students.<sup>438</sup>



**Conservative actors have successfully mobilized a growing number of activists under the age of thirty to push for a regressive agenda at the world stage**

The anti-rights World Youth Alliance provides a broad set of membership and training activities for youth around the world. WYA runs a multi-pronged internship program making links at different levels. They offer on-campus internships in North America for college students to “gain first-hand training and experience in networking” and managing community-level implementation of the Alliance’s “global project.”<sup>439</sup> Student interns must complete WYA’s specialized Certified Training Program,<sup>440</sup> and are expected to recruit other students to “join the mission of bringing WYA to campus” and establish WYA as an official chapter on campus. Student interns also receive training in fundraising and opportunities to meet and network with other youth members. Alliance chapters have thus far been established in several high schools and universities, including at the University of the Philippines–Vasavas, Seton Hall, Rutgers University, the University of Toronto, Georgia State University, LSPR Jakarta, etc.<sup>441</sup>

### The Alliance trains hundred of young people around the world each year in the service of their conservative agenda

The Alliance builds its youth network abroad through internships affiliated with their regional offices, based in Europe, Africa, North America, Latin America, the Middle East, and Asia Pacific. In 2015 the Alliance received funding from the UN Democracy Fund to launch a two-year “Emerging Leaders of the Arab Region” program.<sup>442</sup> Finally, the Alliance bolsters its operations at the UN in part through its international advocacy internship and fellowship program, based in New York. Both fellows and interns are required to first complete WYA’s specialized training, and the Alliance actively recruits participants with advanced degrees, particularly in law and international relations.<sup>443</sup>

The Alliance’s Certified Training Program is the entry point into the WYA’s many networking and policy tracks, covering issues of ‘human dignity’, culture, international law, and human rights with a specialized lens.<sup>444</sup> The World Youth Alliance also runs book clubs, summer camps, and a UN leadership training program. All WYA members are invited to the International Solidarity Forum, an annual training event at the UN in New York, which features “lectures and discussions on topics relevant to ongoing international policy debates.”<sup>445</sup> Finally, the Alliance runs Emerging Leaders Conferences out of each of its regional offices yearly, hosting 440 participants in 2015.<sup>446</sup> Altogether, the Alliance trains hundred of young people around the world each year in the service of their conservative agenda.

As above, the World Congress of Families also prioritizes youth training. World conferences include an ‘Emerging Leaders’ track, with approximately 500 trainees attending the 2015 conference in Salt Lake City.<sup>447</sup>

## 7. Delegitimization and defunding of UN agencies, Special Procedures, and treaty monitoring bodies

In large part, anti-rights non-State actors active at the international human rights level focus their attention on political mechanisms,<sup>448</sup> where their goal has been to foster and influence a base of State missions large enough to break consensus or push through new language. Conservative CSOs and other actors, in contrast, are skeptical of their influence with authoritative expert mechanisms like the UN Special Procedures and treaty monitoring bodies (TMBs), and the operative bodies (UN agencies) like the United Nations Population Fund. As such, they adopt multiple blocking and invalidating strategies in relation to each of these bodies’ work.



Generally speaking, ultra-conservative actors aim to invalidate UN agencies by arguing that they are overstepping their mandates and by targeting their funding. They seek to undermine treaty monitoring bodies by suggesting that TMBs have no authority to interpret their respective treaties, and by lobbying friendly governments to nominate experts with anti-rights views for these bodies. And they aim to undercut the Special Procedures by describing them as partisan experts whose work is largely irrelevant to international human rights, and advocating against the renewal of their mandates or for sharp limitation of their purview by describing their work as *ultra vires* or duplicative of the work of other UN bodies.

Anti-rights actors have described UN agencies like the World Health Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) as anti-family and as population ideologues.<sup>449</sup> In many of their briefings, Family Watch International hones in on this tactic, describing UN entities "overstepping their mandates" as a major threat to national sovereignty: "the right of UN Member States to national sovereignty is increasingly being undermined by the actions of rogue UN agencies." In addition, C-Fam maintains a regular series of 'exposes' of the work of UN agencies through its Friday Fax, and the San Jose Articles dwell on this framing at length.

When targeting Special Rapporteurs and treaty monitoring bodies, FWI and others argue that they "are attempting to create new rights to which UN Member States have not consensually agreed."<sup>450</sup> The San Jose Articles state that the CEDAW Committee and other treaty monitoring bodies "have no authority" to interpret treaties "in ways that create new State obligations or that alter the substance of the treaties," and that any such interpretation constitutes an "*ultra vires* act"<sup>451</sup> that does not create any legal obligations on States Parties, nor contribute to the formation of new customary international law.<sup>452</sup>



Ultra-conservative actors aim to invalidate UN agencies by arguing that they are overstepping their mandates and by targeting their funding

As part of this strategy, anti-rights actors attempt to frame the authoritative interpretations of treaty monitoring bodies as “creating new rights,” and to thus invalidate altogether the work of TMBs and Special Procedures mandate holders. Ultra-conservative CSOs and others propagate a convoluted and inaccurate reading of international law that claims that only consensus language originating from the UN General Assembly can develop “new human rights.”<sup>453</sup> While this is misleading and sidesteps realities of the creation and interpretation of international human rights law and the nature of binding treaties and development of customary law, it is a flattering and appealing argument for some Member States.

### Anti-rights actors attempt to frame the authoritative interpretations of treaty monitoring bodies as “creating new rights”

Grounding the invalidation of UN mechanisms in arguments of national sovereignty gives ammunition to governments who are reviewed by treaty monitoring bodies and advised by Special Procedures for their compliance to human rights standards. This line of argumentation also allows them to defend and continue their human rights violations with impunity on the basis that the reviewing mechanism is itself faulty. This strategy has far-reaching implications for State accountability. In 2015 and 2016 several Member States were highly critical of thematic reports from the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women and the Working Group on Discrimination against Women, arguing, for example, that their reports took insufficient account of religious and cultural difference.

At the same time, anti-rights actors, proceeding from their arguments that UN mechanisms are biased and anti-family, have worked to defund UN agencies that focus on rights related to gender and sexuality. Less than 4% of the overall UN budget is allocated to human rights,<sup>454</sup> even though human rights form one of the three pillars of the UN, and Special Procedures mandate holders must work on a voluntary basis and are severely understaffed. This persistent lack of funding undermines an enabling environment for human rights. Where the UN’s institutions dealing with human rights are chronically underfunded, they are left even more exposed to ultra-conservative attacks. For example, U.S.-based Christian Right organizations like the Population Research Institute and C-Fam have long lobbied to cut U.S. funding to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA),<sup>455</sup> and successfully cut all funding to the UN agency under the Kemp-Katsen amendment from 2001-2008.<sup>456</sup> In April 2017, the new U.S. administration under Trump and the vehemently anti-abortion Vice President Pence decided to eliminate all funding for UNFPA, resulting in the loss of \$32.5 million for the agency.<sup>457</sup>

### This line of argumentation also allows them to defend and continue their human rights violations with impunity on the basis that the reviewing mechanism is itself faulty

Together, these tactics put pressure on UN agencies and limit their ability to work in the most essential of ways: by depriving them of funds and by attempting to shape their agendas through fear of defunding. Feminist activists have argued that the constant pressure on the CEDAW Committee and UNFPA, for instance, has led them to be more cautious about their engagement with rights related to gender and sexuality.

## 8. Online organizing

Anti-rights actors increasingly supplement their strategies and lobbying efforts by mobilizing online. Linked up through regular newsletters and networks online, conservative non-State actors use social media—especially twitter and Facebook—in similar ways as progressive activists, to promote their activities and messaging and to share reports and briefings from international human rights spaces more quickly and widely.

Anti-rights actors increasingly supplement their strategies and lobbying efforts by mobilizing online

Christian Right CSOs also attempt to mobilize their audiences for calls to action online, importing the model of letter-writing campaigns, and online petition platforms like MoveOn.org. As detailed above, Family Watch International has supplemented its lobbying at the CSW and Human Rights Council with online letter writing campaigns that target State delegates at the UN, and government officials working at the domestic level.

CitizenGo,<sup>458</sup> the Spanish organization which works closely with the World Congress of Families and has supported campaigns by FWI, the UN Family Rights Caucus, and C-Fam, markets itself as the conservative version of online platforms, such as Change.org. The platform, which targets national and global audiences, was founded by Ignacio Arsuaga, as noted, also the founder of the organization HazteOir<sup>459</sup>. The latter organization came into prominence through its mobilization against a 2010 bill to liberalize abortion laws in Spain, and hosted the 2012 World Congress of Families in Madrid.

In order to increase engagement, profile, and funding, CitizenGo operates as a membership platform, raising money through member donations. It is estimated that the organization raises at least EUR 30,000 – 40,000 monthly from its membership,<sup>460</sup> which has climbed since 2013 to over EUR 4.7 million.<sup>461</sup> The platform currently offers online campaigns in seven languages (English, Spanish, French, Portuguese, Italian, German, and Polish), and has plans to add Chinese and Arabic. CitizenGo also has ties to the U.S. National Organization for Marriage, with President Brian Brown on the board of directors.

A September 2016 petition to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon calling on him to oppose the establishment of a UN international day on safe abortion has gathered over 172,000 signatures

In addition to its national-level online campaigns—for instance, against ‘transgender ideology’ in the United Kingdom,<sup>462</sup> and against ‘abortion tourism’ in Norway,<sup>463</sup>—a number of international campaigns targeting human rights have been launched and promoted on the platform. A November 2016 online petition targeting the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for its “indoctrination” of children with “LGBT propaganda worldwide” has nearly 70,000 signatures.<sup>464</sup> A September 2016 petition to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon calling on him to oppose the establishment of a UN international day on safe abortion has gathered over 172,000 signatures.<sup>465</sup> And an ongoing online petition was launched in November 2016 calling on the UN General Assembly to block the new mandate holder on sexual orientation and gender identity has reached nearly 96,000 signatures,<sup>466</sup> after CitizenGo’s June 2016 campaign on the related Human Rights Council SOGI resolution, targeting State delegates at the Council.<sup>467</sup>

- 388 World Family Policy Center Forum, 1999, <http://www.law2.byu.edu/wfpc/forum/forum.htm>
- 389 Jennifer S. Butler, *Born Again: The Christian Right Globalized*, 2006.
- 390 Such as the 'Stand for the Family' conference, [http://www.thenewcivilrightsmovement.com/ex\\_gay\\_testimony\\_plays\\_key\\_role\\_in\\_keeping\\_gay\\_therapy\\_bills\\_from\\_votes\\_in\\_most\\_states](http://www.thenewcivilrightsmovement.com/ex_gay_testimony_plays_key_role_in_keeping_gay_therapy_bills_from_votes_in_most_states) (Thomas Alberts, Bills To Ban Harmful 'Ex-Gay' Therapy Are Stalling – 'Ex-Gay' Activists To Blame, The New Civil Rights Movement, Aug/17/2014).
- 391 See the invitation to the training meeting here: [http://cloudfront.equalitymatters.org/static/equality/pdf/family-watch-delegate\\_invitation.pdf](http://cloudfront.equalitymatters.org/static/equality/pdf/family-watch-delegate_invitation.pdf)
- 392 Katherine Marshall, *Family Watch International Mangles Families and Rights*, Huffington Post, November 2011, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/katherine-marshall/family-watch-international\\_b\\_1091222.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/katherine-marshall/family-watch-international_b_1091222.html)
- 393 *ibid.*
- 394 *Fund Forum Takes Part at International Global Family Policy Forum 2013*, UzReport, [http://news.uzreport.uz/news\\_3\\_e\\_102317.html](http://news.uzreport.uz/news_3_e_102317.html).
- 395 The text of her address is available at <https://plus.google.com/+ChristianWohlgemuthIng/posts/LWAKs73CBvV>
- 396 Online at <http://fwi.undatabase.org/site/login>
- 397 [http://cloudfront.equalitymatters.org/static/equality/pdf/family-watch-delegate\\_invitation.pdf](http://cloudfront.equalitymatters.org/static/equality/pdf/family-watch-delegate_invitation.pdf)
- 398 Currently, a number of missions to the UN are small and lack the staff support to conduct significant independent research. Anti-rights training and materials aim to fill this gap, and independent checking of regressive language is minimized by this lack of capacity.
- 399 Cole Parke, *Queer Spy at the Anti-Gay Conference*, The Daily Beast, October 2015, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/10/28/queer-spy-at-the-anti-gay-conference.html>.
- 400 *ibid.*
- 401 See <http://www.politicalnetworkforvalues.org/home.html>
- 402 See also the December 2014 PNV UN press conference entitled 'Strengthening the Family for Sustainable Development' at <http://webtv.un.org/watch/political-network-for-values-strengthening-the-family-for-sustainable-development-press-conference/3926309670001#full-text>. The formal event was hosted by the Permanent Mission of Hungary and featured the following speakers: Zoltan Balog, Minister for Human Capacities of Hungary; Jeff Fortenberry, United States House of Representatives for Nebraska's first district; Oscar Ivan Zuluaga, President of the Democratic Center Party in Colombia; and Helen M. Alvaré, Professor at George Mason University School of Law.
- 403 In which they were unsuccessful; current anti-rights organizing around the SDGs continues with a focus on reservations and influence on implementation and interpretation, as for example articulated in 'Family Capital and the SDGs', above.
- 404 Brian Brown, president of the World Congress of Families and the National Organization of Marriage, made the opening remarks at the Summit.
- 405 The Declaration and signatures is available at <http://rightsofthefamily.org/>
- 406 Josh Craddock, *60 Parliamentarians from 20 Countries Adopt Pro-Family Declaration at UN*, Aleteia, December 2014, <http://aleteia.org/2014/12/09/60-parliamentarians-from-20-countries-adopt-pro-family-declaration-at-un/>
- 407 <http://www.politicalnetworkforvalues.org/aims.html>
- 408 The agenda and speakers are available at <http://www.politicalnetworkforvalues.org/washington-2015.html>
- 409 *ibid.*
- 410 Key state attendees and speakers at Network Summits include: Oscar Ivan Zuluaga, former presidential candidate for the Colombian right-wing party Democratic Center, created by former President Alvaro Uribe. Other participants included: Julio Rosas (Peru), evangelical congressman from the Fujimorista Popular Force party, known for his opposition to civil unions for same-sex couples and to the protocol for therapeutic abortion; Jose Dario Salazar (Colombia), former Senator of the Conservative Party and one of the promoters of a referendum against abortion rights in Colombia; Ilva Myriam Hoyos (Colombia) current Attorney General for the Defense of the Rights of the Child, Youth and Family, and founder of the ultraconservative organization Future Colombia (Futuro Colombia), which led the movement opposed to abortion legalization in 2006. Also participating were Jaime Oreja (Spain), former MEP for the Popular Party, promoter of the "One of Us" initiative; Liliana Negre de Alonso (Argentina), former senator and strong opponent to sexual and reproductive rights, known for her opposition to the recognition of same sex marriage; Orlando Anaya (Mexico), PAN senator who presented an initiative to establish a three years residency requirement for women who want to have an abortion in Mexico City.
- 411 The list of all Member State reservations to the text to date: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/reservations-country.htm>
- 412 United Nations, *Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties*, 23 May 1969, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1155: <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%201155/volume-1155-I-18232-English.pdf>
- 413 Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action: "[I]t is the duty of States, regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems, to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms."
- 414 With reference to ICCPR, article 3, UN Human Rights Committee (HRC), CCPR General Comment No. 28: Article 3 (The Equality of Rights Between Men and Women), 29 March 2000, CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.10: "States Parties should ensure that traditional, historical, religious or cultural attitudes are not used to justify violations of women's right to equality." The ICCPR has been ratified by almost all states and its provisions reflect customary international law. It is also subject to few reservations.
- 415 Which are compiled in an official UN document at <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N14/590/04/PDF/N1459004.pdf?OpenElement>
- 416 *Setting Stage for Upcoming Session, General Assembly Transmits Text on Ambitious Post-2015 Development Agenda*, United Nations, GA/11670, Sep/11/2015, <http://www.un.org/press/en/2015/ga11670.doc.htm> for a summary, and listed at [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/68/970/Add.2](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/68/970/Add.2)
- 417 [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/68/970/Add.2](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/68/970/Add.2) (August 25, 2015).

- 418 Declaration on Rights of Children and their Families, Article III.
- 419 Declaration on Rights of Children and their Families, Article VII.
- 420 Family Articles, Paragraph 5.
- 421 Family Articles, Paragraph 7.
- 422 Decalogue of Commitments, Paragraph 2.
- 423 Decalogue of Commitments, Paragraph 4.
- 424 Decalogue of Commitments, Paragraph 5.
- 425 Decalogue of Commitments, Paragraph 7.
- 426 Decalogue of Commitments, Paragraph 9.
- 427 San Jose Articles, Article 1.
- 428 San Jose Articles, Article 5.
- 429 San Jose Articles, Article 7.
- 430 San Jose Articles, Article 8.
- 431 Doris Buss and Didi Herman, *Globalizing Family Values: The Christian Right in International Politics*, 2003.
- 432 Ibid.
- 433 <http://www.howardcenter.org/home>
- 434 <http://familyinamerica.org/>
- 435 Jennifer S. Butler, *Born Again: The Christian Right Globalized*, 2006.
- 436 Alliance Defending Freedom, *Arete Academy*, <https://www.adflegal.org/training/arete-academy>
- 437 Ibid.
- 438 International Youth Coalition, *Contributors*, <https://iycoalition.org/contributors/>
- 439 World Youth Alliance, *Get Involved: Internships*, <https://www.wya.net/get-involved/internship/>
- 440 For information on the CTP, see further below and at <https://www.wya.net/programs/ctp/>
- 441 World Youth Alliance, *Chapters and Committees*, <https://www.wya.net/get-involved/chapters-committees/>
- 442 The project will cover five countries, Lebanon, Jordan, UAE, Morocco and Tunisia, and includes training of trainers, two Arab forums, 40 national workshops, and 80 community activities. The program includes training on “human dignity and human rights.” See more at <https://www.wya.net/programs/emerging-leaders-of-the-arab-region/>
- 443 <https://www.wya.net/get-involved/internship/>
- 444 <https://www.wya.net/programs/ctp/>
- 445 For more information, see <https://www.wya.net/programs/isf/>
- 446 World Youth Alliance Annual Report 2015.
- 447 Cole Parke, *The World Congress of Families: Christian Extremism Decoded*, The Daily Beast, October 2015, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/10/30/the-world-congress-of-families-christian-extremism-decoded.html>.
- 448 The fora that are State-led, such as the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council, and UN conferences such as the Commission on the Status of Women and the Commission on Population and Development. In line with this focus and strategy, Family Watch International argues that only the UN General Assembly has the authority to develop “new human rights”: [http://www.familywatchinternational.org/fwi/documents/fwipolicybrief\\_National\\_Sovereignty.pdf](http://www.familywatchinternational.org/fwi/documents/fwipolicybrief_National_Sovereignty.pdf)
- 449 See e.g. Doris Buss and Didi Herman, *Globalizing Family Values: The Christian Right in International Politics*, 2003.
- 450 Family Watch International, *Threats to National Sovereignty: UN Entities Overstepping Their Mandates*, [http://www.familywatchinternational.org/fwi/documents/fwipolicybrief\\_National\\_Sovereignty.pdf](http://www.familywatchinternational.org/fwi/documents/fwipolicybrief_National_Sovereignty.pdf).
- 451 i.e. Beyond the party’s legal authority.
- 452 San Jose Articles, Article 6.
- 453 Family Watch International, *Threats to National Sovereignty*, [http://www.familywatchinternational.org/fwi/documents/fwipolicybrief\\_National\\_Sovereignty.pdf](http://www.familywatchinternational.org/fwi/documents/fwipolicybrief_National_Sovereignty.pdf)
- 454 Far more is allocated to peace and security, and development. Rights related to gender and sexuality, of course, receive much less than even the 3-4% of the UN budget.
- 455 See for example Doris Buss and Didi Herman, *Globalizing Family Values: The Christian Right in International Politics*, 2003.
- 456 Sneha Barot and Susan A. Cohen, *The Global Gag Rule and Fights Over Funding UNFPA: The Issues That Won’t Go Away*, Guttmacher Policy Review, Vol. 18, No.2, Spring 2015.

- <sup>457</sup> Carol Morello, *Trump administration to eliminate its funding for U.N. Population Fund over abortion*, Washington Post, April 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/trump-administration-to-eliminate-its-funding-for-un-population-fund-over-abortion/2017/04/04/d8014bc0-1936-11e7-bcc2-7d1a0973e7b2\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.38ff6048e58f](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/trump-administration-to-eliminate-its-funding-for-un-population-fund-over-abortion/2017/04/04/d8014bc0-1936-11e7-bcc2-7d1a0973e7b2_story.html?utm_term=.38ff6048e58f)
- <sup>458</sup> <http://www.citizenngo.org/en/node/1>
- <sup>459</sup> As above, a member of the board of the World Congress of Families.
- <sup>460</sup> J. Lester Feder, *The Rise Of Europe's Religious Right*, BuzzFeed News World, July 2014, [https://www.buzzfeed.com/lesterfeder/the-rise-of-europes-religious-right?utm\\_term=.qv3KpjuXE#.nwgY7b1Lx](https://www.buzzfeed.com/lesterfeder/the-rise-of-europes-religious-right?utm_term=.qv3KpjuXE#.nwgY7b1Lx).
- <sup>461</sup> <http://www.citizenngo.org/en>
- <sup>462</sup> CitizenGo, *Petition: Don't Let the BBC Promote Transgender Ideology to Your Children Anymore*, October 2016, <http://www.citizenngo.org/en/fm/38188-dont-let-bbc-promote-transgender-ideology-your-children-anymore> (36, 918 signatures).
- <sup>463</sup> CitizenGo, *Petition: Norway Must Reverse Decision Allowing Selective Reduction Abortions and Allowing Abortion Tourism*, October 2016, <http://www.citizenngo.org/en/lf/38119-norway-must-reverse-decision-allowing-abortion-tourism> (8175 signatures).
- <sup>464</sup> CitizenGo, *Petition: UNESCO Seeks to Indoctrinate Children with LGBT Propaganda Worldwide*, November 2016, <http://www.citizenngo.org/en/ed/38639-unesco-seeks-indoctrinate-children-lgbt-propaganda-worldwide> (99,566 signatures).
- <sup>465</sup> CitizenGo, *Petition: Oppose the Establishment of an International Safe Abortion Day at the UN*, September 2016, <http://www.citizenngo.org/en/lf/36999-sign-here-oppose-establishment-international-safe-abortion-day-un> (172,506 signatures).
- <sup>466</sup> CitizenGo, *Petition: Stop the UN Enforcer of the Homosexual Agenda*, November 2016, <http://www.citizenngo.org/en/37926-stop-un-enforcer-homosexual-agenda> (110,892 signatures).
- <sup>467</sup> CitizenGo, *Petition: The UN Aims to Create a 'Gay Gestapo'*, May 2016, <http://www.citizenngo.org/en/fm/35385-un-aims-create-gay-gestapo> (52,559 signatures).





This is one chapter of **Rights at Risk**  
**Observatory on the Universality of Rights Trends Report 2017**

To access the full publication, please visit [www.oursplatform.org](http://www.oursplatform.org)