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Saman Zia-Zarifi

Saman Zia-Zarifi serves as PHR's Executive Director, steering PHR's overall work and acting as PHR's lead representative to policy, practitioner, donor, and constituent communities.

Zarifi, an Iranian-American lawyer with 30 years of experience, was previously the Secretary-General of the International Commission of Jurists, a leading INGO that defends the rule of law worldwide, where he oversaw all aspects of ICJ's work across some 50 countries and 100+ staff. At ICJ, he helped launch and lead initiatives on strengthening global accountability mechanisms as well as responses to public health emergencies. Before joining the ICJ, he led Amnesty International's Asia & Pacific program after leading several teams at Human Rights Watch, including as Washington advocate and deputy director of the Asia program. He has carried out dozens of research and advocacy missions across the world, including in conflict and post-conflict settings in Afghanistan, Iraq, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Thailand.

As a senior research fellow at Erasmus University Rotterdam, Zarifi carried out seminal research on business and human rights, after having worked as a corporate litigator in Los Angeles.

Zarifi received his BA and JD from Cornell University and an LL.M. in human rights law from NYU School of Law. He is fluent in Persian.